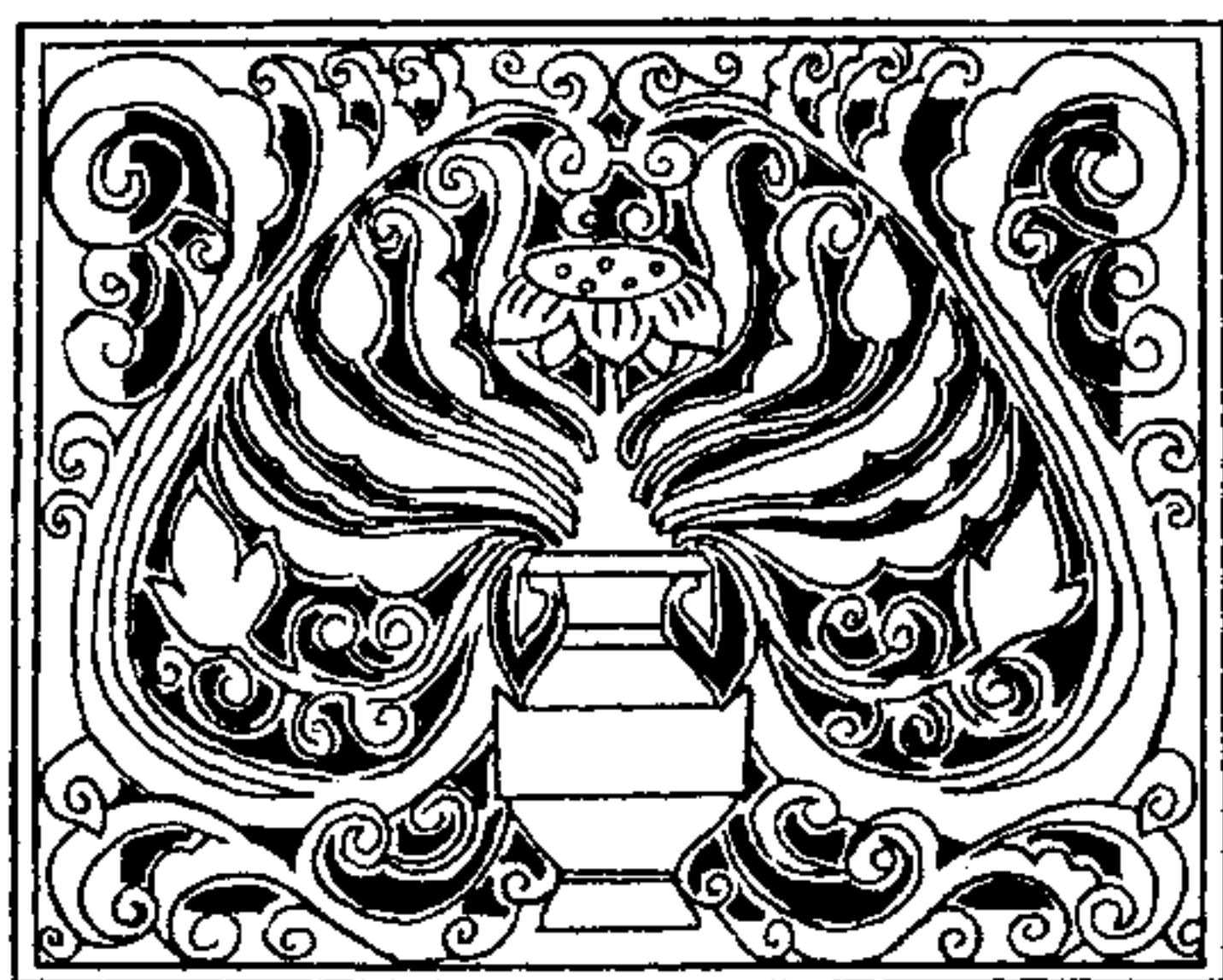




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उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 101

AUGUST 1996

No. 8

Divine Wisdom

THE ATMAN

यथा जलस्थ आभासः स्थलस्थेनावदृश्यते।

स्वाभासेन तथा सूर्यो जलस्थेन

दिवि स्थितः॥

The reflection of light on a wall from a pool of water or a glass diverts a person's attention to the source of that reflection, namely, the pool or the glass. From the reflection in the pool or glass, the sun, its source, shining in the sky, is traced.

एवं त्रिवृदहङ्कारो भूतेन्द्रियमनोमयैः।

स्वाभासैर्लक्षितोऽनेन सदाभासेन सत्यदृक्॥

Even so from the self-consciousness that is reflected in the body-sense-mind combination, their source, the I-sense (ahaṅkāra), is to be traced. The light of self-consciousness in the I-sense is to be traced to the jiva (individual self) who, being a ray of self-luminous Truth (Supreme Being), can gain union with Him through devotion.

भूतसूक्ष्मेन्द्रियमनोबुद्ध्यादिष्विह निद्रया।

लीनेष्वसति यस्तत्र विनिद्रो निरहंक्रियः॥

When in deep sleep the consciousness of the body, mind and all the elements of personality have, as it were, dissolved into nothingness (causal condition), the Atman remains sleepless but without the I-sense and individuality.

मन्यमानस्तदाऽऽत्मानमनष्टो नष्टवन्मृषा।

नष्टेऽहङ्करणे द्रष्टा नष्टवित्त इवातुरः॥

When the I-sense is absent, it may look as though the self is dissolved. But this view is as false as thinking that a man who has been robbed of his wealth is destroyed.

एवं प्रत्यवमृश्यासावात्मानं प्रतिपद्यते।

साहङ्कारस्य द्रव्यस्य योऽवस्थानमनुग्रहः॥

Reflecting in this manner, one arrives at the Atman, which is the support and the enlivener of the I-sense in the body-mind combination.

Why 'Practical Vedanta' ?

Since January 1994 we have been running a feature on real-life incidents under 'Practical Vedanta'. Most of the excerpts concern religious personalities. Some, however, related to contemporaries who though not religious or saintly in the general sense are upright, charitable, helpful and courageous. For example: Nov. '94—the late Rippon Kapoor, the founder of CRY (Child Relief and You), which under his inspiration served some 50,000 deprived children in India since 1979. Dec. '94—Satya Pal Dang and his wife Vimal Dang of Punjab, who 'have been carrying on a relentless campaign with missionary zeal against corruption, dishonesty, incompetence and immorality for the past four decades in Punjab'; besides, both of them are Communist Party members! June '96—Suhasini Devi, W.B., a widow who after her husband died for want of adequate medical facility in the village gifted away her land so a government hospital could be built.

A number of readers wrote to us appreciatively. However, to our astonishment, it has also aroused some disapproving murmurs from a few students of Vedanta and Vivekananda.

What is the gist of their objection? 'How can those real-life incidents, though commendable, be considered "Vedanta in practice", since they involve persons with no idea of Vedanta or Atman or Brahman?'

All we wish to say in answer is that they should re-read Vivekananda more carefully, keeping in mind that he meant his message of Vedanta to be universally meaningful—useful for one and all, irrespective

of age, gender, work; a ladder to climb up slowly to the highest reaches of Vedanta. In his own words,

These are the principles of ethics, but we shall now come down lower and work out the details. We shall see how this Vedanta can be carried into our everyday life, the city life, the country life, the national life, and the home life of every nation. For, if a religion cannot help man wherever he may be, wherever he stands, it is not of much use; it will remain only a theory for the chosen few. Religion, to help mankind, must be ready and able to help him in whatever condition he is, in servitude or in freedom, in the depths of degradation or on the heights of purity; everywhere, equally, it should be able to come to his aid. The principle of Vedanta, or the ideal of religion, or whatever you may call it, will be fulfilled by its capacity for performing this great function.¹

So, these 'Practical Vedanta' critics should have known better. For, we take great care to see that Swamiji's message doesn't get diluted in the name of practicality, social work, and trendy utilitarian ethics or political opinion. We are well aware that his message of Practical Vedanta, Karma Yoga, Service, etc. can get and have got distorted intentionally or otherwise at the hands of the politically-minded to mean

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 2, p. 300-01; hereafter CW.

mere social reform, social service, national uplift, etc.

Besides, we know too that hardly anywhere in his four lectures on 'Practical Vedanta' has he pointedly said that the activities such as those in our series are examples of Vedanta in practice. Further, he has himself cautioned against religion getting secularized through overemphasis on charitable or philanthropic activities. For instance, in his lecture, 'The Practice of Religion', delivered in Alameda, Northern California, in 1900. This lecture, as mentioned by Marie Louise Burke², was with reference to Christianity, and in answer to 'secularization of religion in the name of religion itself, which was rapidly stifling what little mysticism Christianity then possessed.'

This secularized Christianity was then popular as the Social Gospel; and as a movement it was called Socialized Christianity or Christian Socialism. Its chief proponent was the Reverend Charles M. Sheldon, one of whose books was *In His Steps: What Would Christ Do?* Referring to this movement, Mrs. Burke writes:

What would happen, Mr. Sheldon asked, if a whole congregation should follow 'in His steps' for a year, each person conducting his business or profession as Christ would conduct it? ...In February of 1900, Mr. Sheldon conceived the idea of editing a newspaper 'as Christ would edit it'.... (ND., p.74.)

What did Swamiji say in that lecture, 'The Practice of Religion'?

We hear all around us about practical religion, and analysing all that, we find that it can be brought down to one conception—charity to our fellow beings. Is that all of religion? Every day we hear in this country about practical

Christianity—that a man has done some good to his fellow beings. Is that all? What is the goal of life? Is this world the goal of life? Nothing more? Are we to be just what we are, nothing more? The highest dream of many religions is the world. The vast majority of people are dreaming of the time when there will be no more disease, sickness, poverty, or misery of any kind. They will have a good time all around. Practical religion, therefore, simply means: 'Clean the streets! Make it nice!'

Mark therefore, the ordinary theory of practical religion, what it leads to. Charity is great, but the moment you say it is all, you run the risk of running into materialism. It is not religion. It is not better than atheism—a little less. You Christians, have found nothing else in the Bible than working for fellow creatures, building hospitals? Here stands a shopkeeper and says how Jesus would have kept the shop! Jesus would neither have kept a saloon, nor a shop, nor have edited a newspaper. That sort of practical religion is good, not bad, but it is just kindergarten religion. It leads nowhere. (ND., p. 77.)

What he said indirectly about Christian Socialism is applicable equally to Practical Vedanta. Still, following Burke's narration, we have Swamiji's own words to justify our series:

Should we not try to do good then? 'Certainly,' Swamiji would often reply. 'Do good for good's sake!' In India he perhaps spoke more strongly on this point than elsewhere, for in India the futility of material progress as an end in itself was all too well understood. 'What good will come of any kind of work in this evanescent world?' Swamiji's disciple Chakravarty had typically asked him. 'My boy,' Swamiji had answered, 'when death is inevitable, is it not better to die like heroes than as stocks and

2. Burke, M.L., *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1987), vol. 6, p. 76; hereafter ND.

stones? And what is the use of living a day or two more in this transitory world? It is better to wear out than to rust out—specially for the sake of doing the least good to others.’ Further—to the same disciple, who on another occasion had asked the same question: ‘[To do good to others] is necessary for one’s own good. We become forgetful of the ego when we think of the body as dedicated to the service of others.... Thus it is that doing good to others constitutes a way, a means of revealing one’s own Self or Atman.’ (ND., p. 79.)

The following incident from his life which occurred in Paris, and which in fact more than anything else prompted our series, is worth noting. For, it indicates *Swamiji’s* perception of Practical Vedanta:

According to Swamiji’s brother Mahendra Nath Datta, who was often to hear Swamiji tell of it, the coachman [who was driving Swamiji and the Duchesse of Pomar into the suburbs] stopped the phaeton by the side of a village road, along which a little boy and girl were walking with a maidservant. The coachman got down from his seat and caressed the children. Then he got back, took up the reins, and proceeded along the road. With amazement, the Duchesse de Pomar asked, ‘Why did you do that? Those are a gentleman’s children!’ Turning in his seat, the coachman explained that he had been the manager of a large bank in Paris that had recently failed. With what little money remained to him, he had bought the phaeton and horses and was working to support his wife and children in a rented village house, engaging a maid to look after them. The calmness and dignity of the man deeply impressed Swamiji. Telling of the incident, he would say, ‘This is what I call a Practical Vedantist. This man has understood the essence of Vedanta. Falling from such a high estate

to this low condition, he is nonetheless unmoved. Thank God for such power of mind! This man is really a Vedantist! (ND., 1985, vol. 3, p. 205.)

Therefore a person who, though ignorant of Atman, Brahman, etc., remains unshaken by the twist and turns of life by virtue of some ingrained strength is a Practical Vedantin in Swamiji’s eyes. Similarly, anyone who promotes human unity through concern for others is practising the Vedantic truth of unity:

To be able to use what we call Viveka (discrimination), to learn how in every moment of our lives, in every one of our actions, to discriminate between what is right and wrong, true and false, we shall have to know the test of truth, which is purity, oneness. Everything that makes for oneness is truth. (CW., vol. 2, p. 304.)

Do you feel for others? If you do, you are growing in oneness. If you do not feel for others, you may be the most intellectual giant ever born, but you will be nothing; you are but dry intellect, and you will remain so. And if you feel, even if you cannot read any book and do not know any language, you are in the right way. The Lord is yours. (p. 307.)

So, any act that radiates helpfulness, unselfishness, oneness and the resulting fearlessness, honesty and faith in oneself is an instance of Practical Vedanta.

Who cares whether there is a heaven or a hell, who cares if there is a soul or not, who cares if there is an unchangeable or not? Here is the world, and it is full of misery. Go out into it as Buddha did, and struggle to lessen it or die in the attempt. Forget yourselves; this is the first lesson to be learnt, whether you are a theist or an atheist, whether you are an agnostic or a Vedantist, a Christian or a Mohammedan. The one lesson obvious to all is the destruction of the little self and the building up of the Real Self. (p. 353.) □

The Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad

SWAMI SRIDHARANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

यत्तदद्रेश्यमग्राह्यमगोत्रमवर्ण-

मचक्षुःश्रोत्रं तदपाणिपादं।

नित्यं विभुं सर्वगतं सुसूक्ष्मं

तदव्ययं यद्भूतयोनिं परिपश्यन्ति धीराः॥

Yat-tad-adreśyam-agrāhyam-agotram-
avarṇam-

acakṣuḥ-śrotram tad-apāṇi-pādam;
Nityam vibhum sarva-gatam susūkṣmam
tad-avyayam yad-bhūta-yonim
paripaśyanti dhīrāḥ. (I.i.6)

(By the higher knowledge) the wise perceive everywhere That which is unperceivable, ungraspable, without caste, without features, without sight, without hearing, without hands and feet; which is eternal, multifarious, omnipresent, exceedingly subtle and undiminishing (imperishable); and which is the source of all beings.

The problem is that, we who are studying the Upaniṣads know nothing about the *Akṣara* (Immutable), Atman, or Brahman, apart from a not-very-correct, imprecise, intellectual understanding. We have heard for a long time about some indestructible, immutable Existence. Now the teacher has to take us from here and gradually lead us to the point where we can say that, by his (the teacher's) grace, we know what the *Akṣara* is. Our present self-consciousness is what is addressed as 'I', which possesses certain faculties. This is our primary identity, apart from those dependent on family, caste, society and nation, and also on the body with its

five organs of perception and five organs of action, and the four-fold internal organ of *manas*, *buddhi*, *citta* and *ahamkāra* (mind, intellect, mind-stuff, and ego) which relate perceptions and actions to 'I', 'my-ness', and 'am-ness'.

The teacher has to impress upon us that the *Akṣara* is beyond these. He has to teach that there is something beyond our present area of functioning—how I look upon myself, and how I relate myself to others through perceptions and actions. The Upaniṣad takes a common sense approach. First, it concentrates our minds upon our present outlook on ourselves and the changeful world around us. Next, it conveys that the *Akṣara* is something entirely different from those. The teacher, to start with, allows us to retain our ignorance, and then, slowly but totally demolishes that ignorance on the basis of scriptural knowledge (*śruti*), reason (*yukti*), and personal experience (*svānubhūti*). This is known as '*adhyāropa* (wrong attribution)-*apavāda* (denial, refutation)-*nyāya*' (method of superimposition and elimination).

For instance, two of us are walking down a lane and we see something lying in front of us of which I have as yet no conclusive knowledge. I cry out that it is a snake; but you see a rope there. And to convince me you do not start an argument, which would be futile at that stage. Instead you agree with me and tell me to get a stick, so that when I try to kill the illusory snake it will be evident to me that it is a rope and not a snake. This is the superimposition and elimination

method of the scriptures.

This method is adopted by the teacher here. Yes, the world as we see and know it is real; but try to see deeper, below the surface, to get to the underlying Reality. Our awareness of the world and of ourself with our senses and ego is a very compelling experience of our own. But the *Aksara* does not have any of these senses and other qualities.

The definition of the *Aksara* is now given in the subduing language of negation—of what It is not. It is that which is *adrśyam*, which according to Śaṅkara should be *adṛśyam*, i.e. It cannot be seen, even with an electronic device of very high resolution. The eyes see the external world and identify things and people by their *rūpa* (form). The *Aksara* is beyond visual comprehension because It is formless, the 'thing-in-itself' of Kant. Only Its manifestations as endowed with *nāma-rūpa* (name and form) can be seen. Thus It is not an object of the sense-organs, being without *nāma-rūpa*.

Grahaṇa means grasping, a function of the *karmendriyas* (organs of action). The *Aksara* cannot be so grasped, on account of being beyond the reach of the *karmendriyas*. This may be difficult to understand, no doubt, because we have not reached the level where everything is perceived to be Brahman.

Agotram: Further, we classify people through their *gotra*, or lineage—people are said to belong to the *gotra* of some ṛṣi or great man. But Brahman cannot be understood with reference to *gotra*. It can be understood only through the grace of a *guru* who is a knower of Brahman (and who therefore is sometimes said to belong to the *parama-Brahma-gotra*).

Avarṇam: Similarly, Brahman cannot be

identified with any caste. Rather it is indescribable through such social classifications as caste etc. None of the arts and techniques of language or description available to us can take us to That-which-is-in-Itself. Its apparent manifestations, or modifications, here are describable, but the *Aksara* in its original nature is indescribable. A student asked his teacher, 'As I am *pratiṣṭhita* (established) on my seat, and that (seat) on this earth, even so where is the Atman *pratiṣṭhita*, established? The teacher replied, '*Sve mahimni pratiṣṭhitaḥ*, It is established in Its own glory.' That idea is brought out by the word *indescribable*, and it is being told to the students, not to the masters. I know myself to be with eyes, ears, hands, feet, etc. Such an identity is absent in the *Aksara*. The teacher is eliminating from the pupils' mind the idea that the *Aksara* is anything like us with our limited faculties. It is beyond these but within us; It is what we *are*.

Up to this point the *Aksara* is conveyed through negation only. But there must be some positive statement also. The mere use of *neti, neti* (*na iti, na iti*)—not this, not this, makes Reality appear to be a void. To avoid this the teacher must also say *iti, iti*—It is This, It is This. So, next follows the *iti-mukha* or affirmative statements about the *Aksara*.

Nityam means It is eternal, not ending in any point of time; transcending time itself—unlike ourselves in our present state of ignorance, who are born and die in time. At another level of awareness or experience, It is realized as perennial.

Vibhum means *viśeṣa rūpeṇa bhūtam*—that which exists in a special way. That is, It exists in Its own splendour. In other words, It is Existence Itself, to be experienced by *sādhana*, apart from being an object of philosophy.

It exists in a very special way. It is the

omnipresent essence of everything. So it is called *sarvagatam*. The standard example given is that, when we see a snake in the rope we never see half of it as snake and half as rope. The snake seen covers the whole extent of the rope. Similarly the *Akṣara* permeates the whole of the perceived and unperceived universe, and there is not an iota of space where Brahman is not. On this aspect the *Taittiriya-Upaniṣad* says:¹ 'The Supreme Being desired: "I am alone, I shall become many", and having created the many, or the cosmos, He entered into it'. This is the implication of *vibhum* and *sarvagatam*. But, if so, why do we not see It? Because It is *susūkṣma*—so subtle that we have to develop our faculties to see It; for, It transcends the capacity of our faculties to discover It as our true nature, distinct from our qualities or attributes.

The *dhīras* are the *ṛṣis*, *jñānis*, *ātma-draṣṭas*, who are totally unshakable, because they are constantly merged in the Absolute. So, since stability, complete control over will, comes with the knowledge of Atman or Brahman, such people are termed *dhīra-puruṣas*. Having educated and disciplined themselves to the utmost through the experience of the world and seen beyond it the underlying essential Reality, they are no longer shaken by any incident or experience of the world. People who attain to *parā-vidyā* say that the *Akṣara* is the *bhūta-yoni*—the eternal cause of the manifested world. They identify the *Akṣara* not with any mundane object but with the ground of all the things that are perceivable through the senses.

Further, the *dhīras* experience that the universe without and within them originates from that *Akṣara* which is *avyaya*, un-

diminished despite creating this universe. *Paripaśyanti* indicates that there is a vast difference between our seeing and the perception of the *dhīras*.

The teacher does not say in the very beginning that this world is all imagination, *mithyā*, because he accepts that at our level of awareness we cannot but regard it as real. He does declare this truth, '*Brahma satyam, jaganmithyā*,' but not at the outset. So he begins by saying that the manifest cosmos has come out of the *Akṣara*.

यथोर्णनाभिः सृजते गृह्णते च
यथा पृथिव्यामोषधयः संभवन्ति।
यथा सतः पुरुषात् केशलोमानि
तथाऽक्षरात् संभवतीह विश्वम्॥

Yathorṇa-nābhiḥ sṛjate gr̥hṇate ca
yathā pṛthivyām oṣadhayah
sambhavanti;
Yathā sataḥ puruṣāt keśalomāni
tathā'kṣarāt sambhavatīha viśvam. (I.i.7)

As a spider brings out and withdraws into itself (its thread), as herbs (and trees) grow on the earth, as from a living person hair issues out (of the body), so from the Imperishable (Immutable) emerges the universe here (in this phenomenal creation).

Now arises the question how the *Akṣara* changes into the *kṣara*, the Unchanging into the changeful world. If Brahman is the absolute Reality, how then does It take the form of this varied, transient world, which is absolutely contrary to the previous statement about Brahman? So the next thing is to analyse the causes that go to make anything manifest in the world. One is the *upādāna-kāraṇa*, the material cause, and the second is the *kaṛaṇa-kāraṇa*, the instrumental cause, the instruments required to make some-

1. So'kāmayata, bahu-syām prajāyeyeti, sa tapo-
'tapyata, sa tapas-taptvā, idam sarvamasṛjata,
yadidam kim-ca, tat sṛṣṭvā tad-evānuprāviśat
(II.6.1).

thing out of that material. The third cause is *nimitta-kāraṇa*, the efficient cause, the intelligent agent. But we usually take into consideration only the first two causes; for, the intelligent agent is not always obvious. Say, a potter has acquired the knowledge about how clay must be properly prepared, and how to use a potter's wheel to mould objects. Now, with only clay and the potter's wheel, but no skill in the potter, nothing is produced. Thus, materials, instruments and intelligence are *all* needed to produce anything. What type of cause is the *Akṣara*? The answer is given by means of three commonly acceptable examples. In these examples, production occurs not through the combination of three separate causes but through one cause, viz. the *nimitta-kāraṇa*, in which the other two are inherent.

Ūrṇanābhi means a spider, an insect bubbling with life, which can produce thread out of the secretion from its own body and then can also draw into itself that thread again. Similarly, the *Akṣara* brings out the manifold world out of Itself and, when It so desires, also absorbs the cosmos into Itself. So, that One entity includes in itself the role of the *upādāna* and *nimitta-kāraṇas* also. Besides, in this way the concepts of both *śṛṣṭi* and *pralaya* are also suggested here. Thus this creation is *bāhya-sādhana-nirapekṣa*, not dependent on any external aid.

The next illustration is: From the earth, which is uncultivated and apparently lifeless, production of vegetation, grass, shrubs, etc. takes place by itself, without anybody's effort; in the womb of Mother Earth there is a capacity to sustain life all by itself. The various plants grow on their own and ultimately decay into the earth. The teacher has thus chosen examples from the animate and the inanimate worlds: The *ūrṇanābhi* is a living entity while the earth is nonliving. Finally, the Upaniṣad cites a human being,

who without any effort of his own grows hair and nails. All these examples show that one efficient cause can be the cause of production of dissimilar objects without distinct material and instrumental causes to help it. Similarly, the world of diversity has become manifested from the Immutable, without the help of any outside agents.

The *lakṣyārtha*, the final implication of the utterances of the teacher is this: That the diverse cosmos, so concrete and tangible, is projected from the pure Sentience, Consciousness, which is *nirākāra* (without form) and *nirvikalpa* (without modification). How? Though Consciousness and matter are usually looked upon as different from each other and the world as a combination of *cetana* (consciousness) and *jaḍa* (inert matter), Vedānta philosophy proves rationally that the concept of the *jaḍa* has a hold on us only because our level of consciousness has not risen higher. In essence, there is not something that is *cetana* and something else that is *jaḍa*; on the other hand, *jaḍa*, or matter, is a gross manifestation of that subtle *cetana* which we have not yet realized.

Matter, as such, does not exist separate from *Saccidānanda*, Atman or Brahman; in fact, there is nothing but Brahman. The teacher's aim is to explain to us what this matter around us is, how it came up, and how it appears so distinct from *caitanya*. Thus, this cosmology is stated to explain the world as it appears to us who are devoid of the knowledge of Atman or Brahman.

Let us try to understand the *śṛṣṭitattva*, or cosmology, i.e., how the *viśva* (cosmos) came out of *Akṣara* (the Immutable). There are two types of changes that can occur: On curdling, milk totally changes its character. This is the *pariṇāma* (transformation, alteration) kind of change. But when a rope appears to be a snake, it remains a rope at all times—past, present and future. Only for a

time does the rope appear to us as a snake. Is this change real or unreal? It is neither. Further, it is different from the *pariṇāma* kind of change in which the curd cannot be turned back into milk. For, the snake is finally seen and known to be really a rope when the ignorance of the seer comes to an end. This kind of change or production is called *vivarta* (superimposition).

Similarly, the *Akṣara* does not change by way of *pariṇāma* but by way of *vi-varta*—by our thinking or imagining that the *Akṣara* has become the *kṣara* world. It is only because of our ignorance that seeing of the changeful, dialectical world occurs. The *Māṇḍūkya-Kārikā* says that if this *prapañca* (world) had an existence (in the way we think it exists), it would have undoubtedly come to an end.²

What we see as dual and diverse is our misconception: the world exists but is not *nityam, vibhum, sarvagatam*. It is conjured up for just a short time—for as long as our ignorance of our true original nature lasts. A time comes when this *nāma-rūpa jagat* (world with name and form) remains, but its whole value changes into its essence, the *Akṣara*. Again, as in the rope there is the snake-illusion, so in the *Akṣara* there is the illusion of the world (*kṣara, viśva*). When that illusion disappears, everything does not disappear, but now we see only the Real thing with our mature eye of wisdom.

All said and done, our problems resulting from being placed in this world and

being absolutely convinced about its diversity and our own existence in it remain. Where is our present concept of the world to be placed in the context of the *nirguṇa, nirvikāra, nirvikalpa* Brahman (Absolute Brahman devoid of all adjuncts)? This is not a problem for the wise—*dhīra, jñāni, ātmavit puruṣas*—who have experienced the Oneness underlying the world in *nirvikalpa samādhi*. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* says: In this world, a totally unenlightened person, with no conscience or sense of duty, has no problem. So also, one who has gone beyond the domain of ordinary intelligence and experienced Truth in *samādhi* does not have any problem. They both enjoy life in an unrestricted manner. But those in the group between these two extremes are in great pain.³ The present study is for this middle group, who are neither as low as beasts nor have achieved the consummation of human life. Their conscience is pricking, their intelligence is restless, their understanding is incomplete, and these inadequacies torture them.

Then where does this world of ours fit in the Vedantic theory? Śaṅkarācārya says:⁴ 'I will tell you in half a sentence what has been told in millions of books: Brahman alone is real, the world is illusory, and the *jīva* is verily Brahman, they are not separate entities at all.'

Thus the biggest task before the teacher is to convey to us the wisdom arising out of

2. *Prapañco yadi vidyeta*

nivarteta na saṁsayah;

Māyā-mātram-idaṁ dvaitam-

advaitam paramārthataḥ.

—It is beyond question that the phenomenal world would cease to be if it had any existence. All this duality which is nothing but *Māyā*, is but non-duality in reality (1.17).

3. *Yāśca mūḍhatamo loke*

yaśca buddheḥ pāram gataḥ;

Tāvubhau sukhamedhete

klīśyatyantarito janah.

—*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 3.7.17.

4. *Ślokārdhena pravakṣyāmi*

yaduktam granthakoṭibhiḥ;

Brahma satyam jaganmithyā

jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ.

—cf. *Brahmanāmavalīnālā*, 21.

transcendental meditation, the truth of the identity of Atman and Brahman. Slowly he raises our level of consciousness to a point where, at least intellectually, we can understand what *Ātma-vidyā* is all about. The whole world is composed of things with name-form-utility—natural elements in various permutations and combinations giving rise to those things which in the ultimate analysis are but eternal Existence. Whereas this *jagat* (world) is *satya* (true) to us and Brahman is a dream to us today, we are being told to think of the world as *mithyā*, neither real nor unreal, but illusory as in a dream, and to go back to our true identity as Atman. The teacher slowly impresses upon us that in *nirvikalpa samādhi* we will experience for ourselves that this world is nothing but a shadow of the eternal Divine Existence. By the analogy of seeing an illusory snake on the real rope, he is teaching that the eternality and reality we posit on this universe is a mistake.

After experiencing Reality in *nirvikalpa samādhi* through the slow process of spiritual education, we, even while continuing to see the world with our physical eyes, will no longer give to the world the previous erroneous importance of being permanent and real. In its place only Brahman will be experienced in our minds. Our present identity with our body has a hundred per cent hold

on us and we are rooted in the *aham*, 'I'. When we loosen ourselves from this erroneous identification by experiencing our identity with the Divine, then wherever the mind and the senses may move they see everything as the manifestation of the Divine.⁵

The Upaniṣad thus handles the problem of removing from our minds the belief in the concrete eternal existence and reality of the world. With this goal before him, the teacher does not allow us to conceive a second existence apart from Brahman. Otherwise we will think that Brahman is consciousness while the universe is gross matter, and both run parallel; that they also get mixed up; and that this is how the world comes into being. So he gives examples where creation occurs through a *nimitta-kāraṇa* in which the other two *kāraṇas* are inherent. We are not allowed to think of anything else but Brahman. Thus seeing the world of appearances, its hold on us disappears, and only the awareness of the *Akṣara* remains in us.

(to be continued)

5. *Dehābhīmāṇe galite*

vijñāte paramātmāni;

Yatra yatra mano yāti

tatra tatra param padam.

—*Dṛg-dṛśya-viveka*, 30.

The only teacher is he who can immediately come down to the level of the student, and transfer his soul to the student's soul, and see through the student's eyes and hear through his ears and understand through his mind. Such a student can really teach and none else. All these negative, breaking-down, destructive teachers that are in the world can never do any good.

—*Swami Vivekananda*

Nanda, The Pariah Saint

I

It has been well remarked, 'How poor a thing is man if above himself he cannot erect himself': and this erecting of ourselves above ourselves means nothing more than drawing out and developing the divinity that lies concealed in us. Man is a compound of brutality, humanity and divinity (Tamas, Rajas and Sattva) and in proportion as the last is developed, the other two leave him. Not the least remarkable of those that succeeded in this development of divinity—this erecting of oneself above oneself—was Nanda, otherwise called, as we shall see why, *Tirunalaipovar*.

Nanda was born in the Pariah caste, about six hundred years ago. The pariahs are probably the remnants of the ancient non-Aryans of the land and are, as is well known, a despised class. They are regarded as outside the pale of the great Hindu castes—Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra—and it is considered pollution for a man of the three higher castes to approach a pariah. They are in some places attached to land as serfs and in others live by cultivating the soil and are, for their labour, rewarded with a share of the produce, just enough to maintain themselves and their families. In no case however, have they the opportunity for growing rich or owning property. The religious generosity of the higher castes having seldom been so great as to reach this neglected factor of the community, it has been quite passively suffered to build its own society and its own pantheon, and the

result is a number of gross and curious social customs and a multitude of demoniac gods.

The *parachery* (the quarters of the pariahs, always remote from those of the other castes) of Adhanur¹ in which Nanda was born did not, we may be sure, differ in any leading feature from those of today. A number of small, unventilated, single-roomed, hovel-like huts with pumpkin creepers covering their tops and scattered too wildly to be classified into streets or rows, black earthenware generally kept outside the huts, broken mud walls, heaps of rotting bones and other filthy matter abounding on every side, cocks and hens that chuckled and bid their time, dogs that barked all day long, ill-clad women who yelled oftener and louder, and troops of dirty, sunburnt and naked children playing or quarreling—such were the surroundings amidst which our great saint was ushered into the world. Our actions are mixed in character, partly good and partly bad, and Nanda, to whom it was given by the goodness of his previous Karma to set an inspiring example to the world and grow into godhood, was destined, by the necessary counterpart of the same Karma, to be born in the midst of a barbarous community; beauty of Providence is such that our very punishments are blessings in disguise, and the apparently unfavourable conditions under which Nanda was born, themselves

1. In the district of South Arcot, Madras Presidency.

proved to be, as we shall see, for his own good and indirectly for that of the world.

Even in his early boyhood, he was, as we may easily understand, unlike the other boys of the *parachery*; his very play consisted in making figures in clay of God, i.e., as he at that age wanted Him to be—a stout, black man with bold whiskers, a huge lace turban, high-heeled native shoes, and an axe or a scythe in his hand and at the same time very trustworthy, and kind and merciful to those that sought his protection. To make such clay gods, to sing and dance around them, to carry them along in procession, to organize an infant band of bhaktas (pious devotees) and make festivals for his gods were his chief juvenile sports. The small circular *gopuram* (tower) of the Śaivite temple in the Brāhmin part of Adhanur had a strange fascination for his boyish imagination—for there was beauty, grandeur and, as he could not approach it, mystery enough to set them forth in relief. It was this love of the grand, the beautiful and the mysterious that was remarkable in Nanda and chiefly contributed to his salvation. He would often wistfully gaze at that tower wondering at its shape, size and grandeur and busily form guesses about the treasure underneath concealed from his view, which it was meant to glorify. Often as the village god passed in procession with torchlight, music, drums and Vedic chant, Nanda, followed by other pariah boys would run forth to obtain a view, however distant of the festival and return deeply impressed with the procession and its poetic association. He had an inborn respect for all holy things—temples, festivals, Brāhmins and the Vedas, which his low birth tended greatly to develop.

As he grew into manhood, his imaginative fervour and piety also grew with him and deepened and he became more and more eager to contribute what he could, however humble it might be, to the service

of the Lord. It is the tendency of true love to grow till it overflows the heart, and then it can no longer be shut up within, but must necessarily show itself out in action. Nanda long thought over what he could do to please the Lord: he was not rich; he was of low birth; no kind of charity readily suggested itself to him. One day while seriously thinking over the matter, it struck him, all on a sudden that he might supply temples with leather for drums. To him, there was something almost miraculous in the very suddenness of the thought and he rose up with joy and exclaimed, 'The Lord has spoken to me. He has commanded me to supply his drums with leather,' and he immediately set about preparing it. The Lord, indeed, does always keep conversing with us, only, we do not hear Him; and of the things we offer to Him He chooses, not by their value (for He is Himself the Lord of all things) but by the love and piety with which they are offered. The labour of procuring leather, of wetting and tanning it and cutting it into proper sizes, henceforth became to Nanda a sacred pastime and the very smell of leather roused in his imaginative mind a group of holy associations.

He had a few friends in his *parachery*, (it is a pity that their names have not been handed down to posterity) who shared his enthusiasm and sympathized with him in his labours. Every now and then he would speak to them of God's glory and grace, smear himself and them with sacred ashes, and one day, while there was no work to be done in the fields, he stole away with them (we must remember that these pariahs were slaves under the village landlords) to a famous temple a few miles off, called Tirupunkoor, now known as Old Vaitheesverankoil. They went round the village three times, repeatedly besmeared themselves with sacred ashes and shouted forth the names of Śiva. Nanda was beside himself with pious enthusiasm and danced and

wept, and after sunset, when the temple doors were opened, sent forth to the priest his offerings of coconuts, plantain fruits and loads of leather. He and his companions stood outside the temple at a little distance from the flagstaff, and from there obtained occasional glimpses of the Image within. Their joy, particularly that of Nanda, knew no bounds, when they beheld for the first time, though from a distance, the mysterious *sanctasanctorum* of the great temple all radiant with light. The ringing of bells, the crowds of neat looking pious devotees, the recitation of sacred verses, the puja, the burning of camphor, the worshipping with light and other imposing rituals of the temple, and above all the Lingam (image of Śiva) itself, which by its very form filled the whole place with a peculiar solemnity and sacredness, far exceeded his grandest expectations and impressed his imagination much more deeply (here his low birth was an advantage to him) than they did, that of the Brāhmin worshippers inside, who were familiarized to them.

There was to him there a mystery only half cleared, and a solemnity he had never known before; he eagerly drank in the spec-

tacle which to him was new and fascinating; tears flowed in torrents from his eyes and his emotional communion with God became every moment closer and closer, till at last he became completely absorbed in meditation and all thought expired in the enjoyment. Those that saw him were filled with wonder at the steadiness of his devotion, his self-absorption and the serenity that shone in his face in spite of his low caste, and before he woke from his devotional trance, a large and admiring crowd had gathered around him. The sensation created at the time was so great, that his visit to Tirupunkoor has made a distinct epoch in its history and richly added to the glory of its temple, for tradition asserts that while he was standing behind the flagstaff and struggling to get a view of the Lingam inside, Śiva took pity on him and ordered Nandi (the image of a bull placed opposite to the Lingam in all Śaivite temples) to move a little to one side, that His low caste devotee might get a view of Him; and accordingly unto this day, the huge figure of Nandi at Tirupunkoor is placed not exactly opposite to the image of Śiva but leaning to one side.

(to be continued)

Religion is not talk, or doctrines or theories; nor is it sectarianism. Religion cannot live in sects and societies. It is the relation between the soul and God; how can it be made into a society? It would then degenerate into business, and wherever there are business and business principles in religion, spirituality dies. Religion does not consist in erecting temples, or building churches, or attending public worship. It is not to be found in books, or in words, or in lectures or in organizations. Religion consists in realization.

—Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda, A Practical Visionary

SISTER GARGI

The following article was one of four talks given on the same subject at the New Temple of the Vedanta Society of San Francisco on the afternoon of 30 December 1995. The occasion was the Dedication of the Vivekananda Centenary Hall, a part of a three-storey addition to the New Temple building.

As you know, the subject is 'Swami Vivekananda, A Practical Visionary'. Now, what is the meaning of this word *practical*? Often Swamiji was asked, particularly in the pragmatic West, what good will spiritual knowledge do for the world. Generally, the question meant will spiritual knowledge further our worldly interests. If it will, then it is practical; if it hinders our worldly interests or is irrelevant to them, then it is impractical. But Swamiji had no use for this kind of practicality, which weighs the spiritual ideal and trims it down to fit our everyday convenience. He never tampered with the ideal.

And yet, he had all sympathy with the needs and desires of the average person. He wanted everyone to live decently, to have adequate food and clothing and shelter. Moreover, he wanted all men and women to have an education, to be free from superstition, to live in peace with one another, to

Let spiritual people take to the forests if they want; but let the rest of us live good sensible lives in the real world. Why all this talk of Brahman and all that?

pursue their talents and abilities, to enjoy the good things of civilization and of this earth, and be able to face the vicissitudes of life with strength and courage. Swamiji was very practical in these regards, which one might say are of the world.

At the same time he taught the very highest truth—the truth that the only reality is Brahman. The logical corollary to this statement is that the world as we perceive it is unreal, and the only sensible response to *that* is to turn one's back on this world and seek reality in some forest ashrama or mountain cave. And to be sure, this is precisely what thousands and thousands of truth-seekers have done. Down through the ages the teaching of Vedanta has been a teaching of renunciation. But here comes Swamiji. On the one hand, he says Brahman is the only reality and insists on this ideal; on the other hand, he says, 'Religion... must be ready and able to help [man] in whatever condition he is, in servitude or in freedom, in the depths of degradation or on the heights of purity; everywhere, equally, it should be able to come to his aid.'¹

Now, are these not two different, if not opposite, teachings—the first world-rejecting, the second, world-accepting? How can the two be reconciled? Was not Swamiji being highly impractical to think they could be? And why, after all, *should* they be? If we just use our ordinary common sense and ordinary goodness we will be all right—won't we? Our civilization will survive. It will even progress—won't it? Let spiritual people take to the forests if they

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 300–01; hereafter referred to as CW.

want; but let the rest of us live good sensible lives in the real world. Why all this talk of Brahman and all that? In order to answer this question, which today is a pressing one, perhaps we should look a little at the world as most of us good and common-sensical people know it and live in it.

First of all, we think we are very limited, finite, and circumscribed beings. We think we are essentially physical bodies, and the worst part of this is that if we are bodies, we are going to die. This notion haunts us; somehow the idea of our own mortality just doesn't sit well with us. Some philosophers and psychologists tell us to be reasonable and accept death as a natural, inevitable fact of life. But we cannot; we just cannot abide the idea of that particular fact; we deny it and cover it in all possible ways. It is an embarrassment at the heart of our world, and like some ugly secret it taints all our days.

The psychologist Erich Fromm analyzed the fear of death as being basically 'the fear of facing the abyss of nonidentity—of being lost.'² I think this is a true analysis: we dread not so much an end to life, but a loss of identity forever. Consequently, we build up all manner of identities around ourselves as safeguards. Who are we? We are a banker, a politician, a writer, a lawyer, a doctor, a musician, an athlete, a parent, and so on. We need to be somebody in our own right or to belong to some group that will give us standing.

We become jealous of those who make a bigger mark in the world than we do; we are angry with those who get in our way; we hate those who are threats to our importance; we despair if we fail. I do not think there is any profession, or indeed any way of life, in which jealousy, envy, anxiety, and

despair are not present in one form or another. Our need to carve our initials on the universe is at the root of most, if not all, of our problems, and *its* root is our deranged notion that we are limited, mortal beings.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with the identities we build up, providing we do not look for ourselves in them. The trouble with any identity that depends upon our connection to the finite world, as all our fabricated identities do, is that it is like a box made of paper; the bottom can drop out of it at any moment. Relationships, fame, wealth, honour, position—they can all vanish, and, poof, there goes who we are, and along with it, there goes our life; it becomes meaningless. If we are lucky, the box won't break, but the very fact that it *can* break invalidates it.

So what has been the meaning in the first place of our struggles and fights, our anxieties, our victories and our failures? What has been the meaning? That is the big

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question. Somewhere there has to be a foundation more solid than chance; there has to be something that cannot disintegrate or collapse, a foundation we can stand on and say this is who I am. We cannot abide a dicey, meaningless universe, But in this finite world there *is* no foundation.

There is a story. Once in ancient times a young boy asked his father, who happened to be a sage, 'Sir, what holds up the world?' The father answered, 'A giant holds the world on his shoulders.' The boy thought about this for a while and then asked, 'What

2. Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be*, p. 112.

does the giant stand on?' The father answered, 'He stands on the back of a wild boar.' 'What does the wild boar stand on?' 'On the back of a big turtle.' 'What does the big turtle stand on?' 'On the back of a bigger

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turtle.' 'What does the ...' The father held up his hand, 'Don't ask any more, my son. From there on it's turtles all the way.'

Well, the father was right. But I am sure the boy went on asking, at least to himself. The human soul won't settle for an endless column of turtles. We go on seeking for an ultimate foundation. Why? Swamiji answered that question: it is because in actual fact we are not limited, we are not mortal; we are now and always the infinite Self—Brahman.

The whole of civilization is actually the search, misguided and fumbling though it is, for our true selves. And sometimes, when the search rises above the needs and fears of the ego and becomes ego-forgetful and inspired, the search itself becomes an expression of the Infinite. Despite our deep befuddlement, our true nature keeps asserting itself; it peeps out in great art, great literature, great music, as well as through religion and philosophy at their highest and best. And in every age, among every people the Self shines forth in quiet, mostly unsung, acts of compassion and self-sacrifice. The history of the world is brightened by all these unpremeditated intimations of the divine, which lift the heart and save us from despair.

How else could mankind have lasted this long? Civilization is made up of both the blind search for meaning and, now and then, sudden blazings forth of the Self. But because the search is blind and fearful, these inspirations, as we rightly call them—*inspiration* means infusion of the Spirit, or of God—these inspirations are rarely understood for what they are. They are not products of the finite world; they are, rather, a thinning, as it were, of the finite, which allows the Infinite to shine through. Somehow the veil momentarily lifts and we glimpse another realm of being.

Still, despite these persistent signs and messages, we go on seeking the foundation of the objective world *within* the objective world, and as long as we do so, we won't find it, for, to repeat, the objective world, or finite world (they are the same) *has* no foundation. Nor can the finite ever produce the Infinite or evolve into It, or, through reason and analysis, somehow uncover It. The objective world will always be the objective world; in endless time and bottomless space it will just spin on and on without meaning, without purpose. There is no ultimate turtle.

Just see! There is one thing that is impossible to accomplish in this finite universe, and that is to find lasting fulfilment in it. How can the Infinite, which we are, find fulfilment in the finite? And yet, for the very reason that we *are* infinite, we never stop trying, and in the process we make a mess of things—a worse and worse mess as our scientific knowledge increases and our technology enables us to either slowly or explosively self-destruct. This is common sense? It is demented. Really so. Yes, we mean well; we are good people. Human beings are fundamentally good, but our goodness is undermined at the very start because we think we are primarily bodies. That idea is false from the word go: the body is just a speck on the vastness of our true being!

Well, such is the pressure of truth that there comes a time to every individual when the soul awakes. The quest takes another direction. Tentatively at first, we stop looking at the objective world for support and meaning and turn our eyes inward. And there Swami Vivekananda is waiting for us.

Swamiji never tried to make meaning out of this phantasmagoria of a world. He taught that the objective universe can have meaning only through Consciousness (with a capital C). Consciousness is the foundation, not in the sense of being the ultimate object, but in the sense of being the essence of *all* objects, as gold is the essence of all gold ornaments. 'The explanation of everything,' he said, 'is, after all, in yourself....You are the soul of the universe.'³ What is the mean-

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ing? We are the meaning. Not our small empirical selves, but the infinite, eternal Consciousness, which we are and in which and because of which, all these objective forms, including our bodies and minds, have existence.

'Know you are the Infinite,' Swamiji said; 'then fear will die.'⁴ The Infinite is our true identity, and only as our day-to-day lives open doors to this knowledge of ourselves will our lives be meaningful—intensely so, profoundly so, whatever road they may take.

Ordinarily we seem to be caught in a dream. It is as though sunlight, shining

through a stained glass window, thinks it has become entangled in the forms and colours of the glass and thinks it is dependent for its existence on them. But just as sunlight is never in fact caught by the beautiful and terrible pictures of the window, in the same way, the Self is absolutely untouched by what it shines on or through. Rather, it is the Self, or Consciousness, or the Spirit, or Brahman (the terms are interchangeable) that gives all value and reality to that upon which It shines.

I once overheard one newcomer to Vedanta say to another, 'O.K. So everything is Brahman. So what? What difference does it make? Nothing changes.' Ah, but it does change. 'This is a world of good and evil,' Swamiji said. 'Wherever there is good, evil follows, but beyond and behind all these manifestations, all these contradictions ...stands something which is yours, the real you, beyond every evil, and beyond every good, too, and it is that which is manifesting itself as good and bad....Know that, and you will control both good and evil. Then alone the whole vision will change and you will stand up and say, "How beautiful is good and how wonderful is evil!"'⁵

The whole vision will change! And when that happens, our actions toward this world will also change, which, in turn, will bring about changes on our present level of vision. When we see the world as Divinity Itself, when we know ourselves to be immortal Consciousness, all fear will drop away from us; we will have consummate faith in our own completeness; we will have no need to look upon others as inferior to ourselves, no need to exclude others or to possess more than others, no need to be afraid. Indeed when we see all others as divine, the question of superior and inferior will have no meaning. Everyone and everything will

3. CW, vol. 2, p. 237.

4. IT, 44.

5. CW, vol. 2, 181–2.

seem adorable; we will worship all others in whatever way will best serve them, forgetful of ourselves, lost in love.

In short, we will act according to the highest ideal, for we will see the ideal as reality. Certainly the whole world on every level will benefit from such action, and that action will be natural to us not only in forests and ashramas, but in our homes and workplaces and playgrounds. There are not two worlds; there is just one world. We need not compartmentalize it: this side is spiritual, that side is worldly; the monastery is spiritual, the marketplace is worldly. No, Swamiji says; it is all divine; there is just one divine Being. See the world as such and be free!

'When we have become free,' he said, 'we need not go mad and throw up society and rush off to die in the forest or the cave; we shall remain where we were, only we shall understand the whole thing. The same phenomena will remain, but with a new meaning.'⁶

Speaking, as he did, to all of mankind, Swamiji seldom emphasized the unreality of the finite world; rather, he again and again asserted that the essence of the finite, its foundation, is Divinity itself, the Absolute God. We need not renounce anything; we just need to see everything as it really is. Of course, when we see everything as it

really is, we no longer need or desire anything at all. That is freedom.

True, we have to *actually* perceive the world as it really is, our vision has to *really* change, before freedom comes. Just thinking about the ideal is not enough. But generally thinking comes first, and thought is powerful. 'Let [everyone] know what they are,' Swamiji said. 'Let them repeat day and night what they are....I am He, I am He....This is to be heard first. And then let [people] think of it, and out of that thought, out of that heart will proceed works such as the world has never seen.'⁷

Swamiji was convinced that most of us—and, in the long run, all of us—can think of spiritual truth and can lift our lives to the ideal here and now. He all but begged us to do so; shaking us awake with all his power, as one shakes sleepers in the snow. In his boundless compassion, he not only threw the highest truths broadcast, he taught methods and techniques of realizing them and of manifesting them in, as he said, 'every movement of life'.

He knew that our only security, our only meaning, our only lasting joy lay in our ability to act everywhere and all the time, from the centre of our divine nature, and he taught us how to do so. What teaching could be more idealistic? What could be more practical? □

6. *Ibid.*, p. 325.

7. AV, 60.

Instead of hearing foolish things, we must hear about God; instead of talking foolish words, we must talk of God. Instead of reading foolish books, we must read good ones which tell us of God.

—Swami Vivekananda

Krishna, My Beloved

PROF. V. GOPINATH

Krishna! My Krishna! Lotus-eyed child!
Come soon to me to feast my eyes!
I yearn to see your pranks benign:
I wish to see Thee stealing butter,
I wish to see Thy sweet face divine
In seeming fear of the rod of Thy mother!
I wish to see Thee sucking the breasts
Of Poothana the demoness, giving her Mukti!
I wish to see Thee dragging the pestle,
And felling the trees, liberating them truly:
I wish to see Thy beautiful form
Surrounded by Gopis fair and pure!
I thirst to hear Thy song serene
Emanating from Thy flute divine!
O Krishna! come soon to me and bless
My body and mind and soul withal! □

Sri Ramakrishna's Incarnation: A Study

SWAMI SRIDURGANANDA

The author, a monk of our Order residing in our centre at Morabadi, Ranchi, Bihar, hints at Sri Ramakrishna's incarnation being once more an answer of the Divine to the famous Vedic prayer, 'Lead us from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality'. He has also dwelt on some of the other aspects of Sri Ramakrishna's life that have a bearing on the special needs of the present.

Birth

We have seen the advent of yet another incarnation on the sacred land of ascetics and sages, the land of seven rivers and snow-covered Himalayas. The sacredness of this land was further purified by efficacy of a divine birth. He was Sri Ramakrishna, born to Sri Kshudiram Chattopadhyaya and Srimati Chandramani Devi in the then nearly unknown village of Kamarpukur of Hooghly district in Bengal. Before the birth of the child, the father had a celestial dream when he had been on a visit to the holy place of pilgrimage in Gaya (in modern Bihar), to offer traditional oblations of rice balls to his departed ancestors at the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu. In the divine dream the blissful Deity said to Kshudiram that He desired to be born as his son. Kshudiram, being a poor Brahmin, was afraid, for how could he take proper care of the Lord of the Universe born as his son? However, he had to yield to the will of the Divine Being. Mitigating his anxiety, the Lord assured Kshudiram that whatever was offered to Him with devotion would be accepted.

A few days after the return of Kshudiram, Chandramani Devi had a vision of Lord Shiva. In front of the Shiva temple at Kamarpukur, Chandramani Devi saw a mass of effulgent Consciousness in the form of Light emanate from the Linga and enter her body. She fell down in a swoon, overwhelmed by the experience. After a while

she realized she was with the Divine Child. She disclosed this supernatural event to Kshudiram and also learned from him of the heavenly dream he had himself seen in Gaya. In the course of her expectancy, Chandramani Devi often had divine visions and dreams of gods and goddesses. At last arrived the auspicious moment of birth and the coming of the Incarnation. A beautiful child was born to Chandramani Devi at dawn on 18th February 1836, in the paddy threshing hut of Kshudiram's home. The child was named Gadadhar, after the name of Vishnu, and later, following initiation into sannyāsa by Totapuri, the Vedantic mystic from northwestern India, became Sri Ramakrishna. Now, we need to ask, what made the Lord of the Universe assume a human body once again? There had of course been several Incarnations prior to him, who were born to redeem mankind. We shall discuss this phenomenon briefly.

Necessity

The Supreme Being takes human form to redirect the human mind towards noble thoughts, purity and morality. He also destroys evil and ignorance in human society. Owing to the cycle of repeated birth and death man forgets his real nature, which is essentially pure and divine. Instead of becoming aware of his true nature he becomes deluded and a victim of rebirth and transmigration. This happens because of ignorance—through a process which in Vedanta

is called *kāraṇa-adhyāsa*,¹ primordial superimposition of ignorance on the true nature of a human being as Atman or Brahman.

The Incarnation, Sri Ramakrishna, embodied Himself to remove this primordial superimposition on man's eternal nature which is ever-pure, self-effulgent, eternal, and ever-free. This superimposition is like a cloud that hides the sun. Sometimes the sun cannot be seen on account of a thin patch of cloud. When that disappears, one sees the sun.² Sri Ramakrishna in reply to a question put by the Brahmo preacher, Sri Vijay Krishna Goswami, 'Sir, why are we bound like this? Why don't we see God?', said, 'Just look, I am creating a barrier in front of my face with this towel. Now you don't see me, even though I am so near. Likewise, God is the nearest of all, but we cannot see Him due to the covering of Māyā. The *jīvā* is nothing but the embodiment of Satchidānanda. But since Māyā or ego has created various limiting adjuncts (*upādhis*), he has forgotten his real Self.'³

Sri Ramakrishna removed the veil of ignorance of his disciples. Even by his mere touch he could bestow on his devotees the superconscious experience of their spiritual nature. He 'had the divine power to transmit spirituality to others and lift them to higher states of consciousness, this he would do

either by thought, power, or touch.'⁴

Just a few months before giving up his mortal body in 1886, at the garden house of Cossipore in Calcutta, he became a 'wish-fulfilling tree' and bestowed heavenly grace to all those assembled around him. In divine ecstasy he uttered these words: 'May you all be blessed with spiritual awakening.'⁵ As a result of this grace, the primordial ignorance of those who came near him was removed altogether for the time being and they experienced the bliss of God-vision.

Sowed the Seed of Eternal Freedom

'Everything that we perceive around us is struggling towards freedom, from the atom to the man, from the insentient, lifeless particle of matter to the highest existence on earth, the human soul. The whole universe is in fact the result of this struggle for freedom.'⁶ Thus said Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, whom the Master regarded as Narayana (God) in human form. This is the constant struggle of the created being: to achieve absolute freedom. The struggle will not end until all are emancipated. Every human being tends naturally to seek this eternal freedom either consciously or unconsciously. This obvious longing exists since... 'from freedom it comes and becomes moulded into this bondage and it gets out and goes back to freedom again.'⁷ Sri Ramakrishna was born to sow the seed of eternal freedom in his disciples, devotees and followers. This uninterrupted stream of longing to become free is still flowing in the hearts and minds

1. Adhyāsa means superimposition or ascription of the attribute of one thing to another. cf., *The Universe, God and God-Realization*, by Swami Satprakashananda (The Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 205 South Skinker Boulevard, St. Louis, Missouri, 63105, U.S.A.), 1977, pp. 97-8.

2. 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, tr. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1947), p. 100.

3. *Ibid.* p. 100.

4. *A Bridge to Eternity* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986), p. 15.

5. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*, tr. Swami Jagadananda (Madras, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1952), p. 895.

6. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1963), vol. 1, p. 108.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

of his devotees even now, a hundred years after the bereavement of his passing away.

Paved the Path from Darkness to Light

The absence of light is darkness. That corresponds to cosmic ignorance, which is absence of spiritual knowledge. The darkness of ignorance deludes man and leads him to an unreal destination. In most of the circumstances, man takes worldly pleasures to be the real pleasures, which in fact are momentary and impermanent. As a repercussion, those pleasures bring misery and affliction. Even then man is contented with pleasures. In the parable of Sri Ramakrishna, 'the camel eats thorny shrubs, and blood gushes from its mouth; still it will eat thorns.'⁸ The man of discrimination therefore, from time immemorial, is in search of the eternal Reality. The experience of discovering his real nature gives him boundless joy. When a person enjoys such divine pleasure, all worldly pleasures become unreal and tasteless to him.

Sri Ramakrishna came to enlighten humanity to follow the bright path devoid of darkness. In our mundane life, when a person 'becomes convinced that there is no assurance of security in the temporal order, there is no prospect of unmixed blessing in the relative universe characterized by dualities, he gets a glimpse of his spiritual bondage. Yet in the depth of his heart there is a cry for Life beyond death, for the Light beyond darkness, for the Joy beyond sorrow. Where else but in God can he find them? He understands that there is one Supreme Being who alone is eternal, who alone is free, who alone is perfect, while all else is short-lived, bound and imperfect.'¹⁰ So he follows the bright path, devoid of

illusion, laid down by the Incarnation and achieves supreme bliss.

Leading from Mortality to Immortality

Deprivation of the vital force (*prāṇa*) from the human body is death, and the presence of it is life. Whatever has life perishes, and is born again, until the soul recovers its Self-knowledge. The cycle of life and death continues unceasingly until man becomes immortal by surmounting mortality. What else could be the purpose of human birth followed by death and rebirth? Could man not just drift away from this cycle of life and death? No. Helplessly entangled in the web of *Māyā*, he requires the grace of the Divine Incarnation. The Divine born as Sri Ramakrishna, brought the message of hope and help to humankind to attain the goal of earthly existence. He taught that 'to realize God is the one goal of life'¹¹, thereby to get release from repeated births and deaths. The purpose of life 'has to serve as a means to life beyond. Its supreme purpose is to lead us from mortality to immortality...from the ever-changing psychophysical level to the realm of eternal spirit. All its resources must develop with that end in view....All temporal interests must be directed to the attainment of the Supreme Goal,'¹² the attainment of God.

Upgrading Womanhood

The coming of Sri Ramakrishna was especially to protect, uplift and worship the Divine Motherhood of God in all women. This was a crying need of the time, owing to the hapless state of women in society. Sri Ramakrishna was a great boon to women because his attitude towards all, the high and the low, was to revere the Divine Mother in them. To a visiting gentleman he once said, 'As for myself, I look on all women as my mother. Every woman is a

8. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 118.

9. *Līlā* here denotes the divine play of the world, which man fails to comprehend as God's play and glory.

10. *The Universe, God and God-Realization*, p. 53.

11. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 357.

12. *The Universe, God and God-Realization*, p. 287.

mother to me.'¹³ Regarding this worshipful attitude Mahapurush Maharaj (Swami Shivananda), one of Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples, said to the monks and novices at the Belur Monastery: '...And whenever you meet a woman, salute her mentally as your mother, with all respect. That was the special instruction of the Master to us, and he himself did so all his life.'¹⁴

Even though he passed away, Sri Ramakrishna, left behind his divine consort Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, the very embodiment of Motherhood, to take care of the ideal and uplift of womanhood. This was a unique characteristic of this Incarnation. Swami Vivekananda, upholding this ideal, opined to one of his disciples: 'All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which [does] not respect women [has] never become great, nor will ever be in future.'¹⁵ It was the spiritual attitude of Sri Ramakrishna towards all women which is gradually bringing about upliftment of womanhood and a change in women's status in our society.

Amity in Plurality

In common parlance, pure and noble thought, morality, faith, spiritual experience and expression constitute the ideal of all religions. This is a wonderful development of human civilization over hundreds and thousands of years. This development would have been a more powerful civilizing force for mankind had there always been amity-in-plurality among the religions. On the contrary, we observe that whenever a new religion originated out of an existing belief, it made every possible effort to efface

whatever pre-existing faith there was. Buddhism uprooted the practices of almost half of the Hindus on their own soil. Christianity, pushed its way to thrive in the ancient land of the Hebrews. Islam expanded through war and conquest and caused the followers of Zoroaster to flee Persia. So nearly every religious episode in its nascence was bloodshed, devastation and power of the throne. Yet, as time conquers everything, it also effected changes in all the important religions. Developing churches and monasteries in the middle ages brought upliftment and education to the people in Christianity. Revival of Hinduism in India by Shankaracharya halted the corruption and travesty of decadent Buddhism. Islamic militancy too had to undergo some moderating influences.

Meanwhile India became a shelter to different religions, many of whose numbers were refugees as a result of tyranny, through invasions, or because of other reasons. By the beginning of the 19th century, before the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, there were significant numbers of Jews, Christians, Parsees, Moslems, Buddhists and others. Along with the sects which had come from Hinduism itself—Jains, Sikhs and others, India composed a great religious plurality. Plurality of religious beliefs saw polarity of thoughts and ideological contradictions among religions. Consequently, unity in diversity, or harmony of religions, was the dream of the people. Sri Ramakrishna, under such odds, brought the light of amity and acceptance. Undergoing great spiritual penance following many religious paths over a long period, he realized the ultimate truth that eternal reality is One, though men of discriminating intellect expound it differently.¹⁶ That was the same supreme Truth that was revealed to Āryan mystics long long ago before any scripture was written.

(Continued on page 489)

13. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 225.

14. *For Seekers of God*, tr. Swami Vividishananda & Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1975), p. 220.

15. *Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works*, vol. 7, p. 215.

16. एकं सद् विप्राः बहुधा वदन्ति ...।—*Rg-Veda*.

Ten Verses on the Divine Experiences of Devi Roop Bhavani

Translated by

MS. APARNA DAR

(Continued from the previous issue)*

मोहो न व्यादि नच वैराग्यम्
नच राग द्विषम् निवेरं शान्ति
सोपुन् न जागथ् सु शोदबोदम्
सूख्मो स्वयंभू परं ब्रह्म सोऽहम्॥६

*Moho na vyādi naca vairāgyam
naca rāga dvīṣam niveram śānti
sopun na jāgath su śodabodam
sūkhmo svayambhū
param brahma so'ham. (6)*

मोहो, *moho*—delusion, infatuation; व्यादि, *vyādi*—disease; वैराग्यम्, *vairāgyam*—freedom from worldly desires; राग, *rāga*—attachment; द्विषम्, *dvīṣam*—hatred, enmity, aversion; निवेरं, *niveram*—devoid of enmity, friendly; शान्ति, *śānti*—peace; सोपुन्, *sopun*—dreaming; जागथ्, *jāgath*—awake; शोदबोदम्, *śodabodam*—pure consciousness; सूख्मो, *sūkhmo*—subtle; स्वयंभू, *svayambhū*—self-created, self-existent; परं ब्रह्म सोऽहम्, *param brahma so'ham*—I who am the Atman have become one with supreme Brahman.

The Atman is free from infatuation and is untouched by any disease; It is free of all worldly desires.

The Atman has no attachment, nor any aversion; It is devoid of enmity and is peaceful.

The Atman cannot be known in the

dreaming state, nor in the waking state. It is pure consciousness.

The Atman is subtle and self-existent. I who am the Atman have become one with the supreme Brahman.

पादप न बीजम् न चतुर्बुजाकारम्
सु त्रे-जग चराचर अनन्तरूपम्
अनाम सहस्रनाम किन्तु निरादारम्
शुद्धं स्वरूपं तथ् परंब्रह्म सोऽहम्॥७

*Pādapa na bijam na caturbujākāram
su tre-jaga carācara anantarūpam
anāma sahasranāma kintu nirādāram
śuddham svarūpam tath
parambrahma so'ham. (7)*

पादप, *pādapa*—tree; बीजम्, *bijam*—seed; चतुर्बुजाकारम्, *caturbujākāram*—whose form has four arms; त्रे, *tre*—three; जग, *jaga*—world; चराचर, *carācara*—animate and inanimate, living and non-living; अनन्तरूपम्, *anantarūpam*—limitless form; अनाम, *anāma*—nameless; सहस्रनाम, *saahasranāma*—thousand names; निरादारम्, *nirādāram*—without support; शुद्धं, *śuddham*—pure; स्वरूपं, *svarūpam*—form, nature.

The Atman is neither of the form of a tree, nor that of a seed. Its form has four arms (Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Moksha).

The Atman pervades the three worlds, and all the living and the non-living creation; yet the Atman has limitless forms

* Please see our note and translator's letter at the end of this article—Ed.

(through which It manifests).

The Atman has no name; again, it has a thousand names; yet the Atman is without support.

The Atman is of pure nature. I who am the Atman am one with the supreme Brahman.

स्यदू न कजू अविद्या न विद्या
रेद्धी न स्यद्धी न सुआकाश रूपम्
बोवा काश वोलंगिथ् नच राज यूगम्
न सालम्ब नैरालम्ब परम्ब्रह्म सोऽहम्॥८

*Syadū na kajū avidyā na vidyā
reddhī na syaddhī na suākāśa rūpam
bovā kāśa volaṅgith naca rāja yūgam
na sālamba nairālamba
parambrahma so'ham. (8)*

स्यदू, *syadū*—straight; कजू, *kajū*—crooked; अविद्या, *avidyā*—ignorance; विद्या, *vidyā*—knowledge; रेद्धी, *reddhī*—*riddhi* (wealth); स्यद्धी, *syaddhī*—*siddhi* (the occult powers); सुआकाश, *suākāśa*—all-pervasive like the sky; रूपम्, *rūpam*—form; बोवा, *bovā*—sow; काश, *kāśa*—sky; वोलंगिथ्, *volaṅgith*—earth; राज यूगम्, *rāja yūgam*—Raja Yoga; सालम्ब, *sālamb*—with support; नैरालम्ब, *nairālam*—without support.

The Atman is beyond straightness and crookedness, ignorance and knowledge.

The Atman is also beyond *riddhi* (wealth) and *siddhi* (the occult powers); Its form is all-pervasive like the skies.

The Atman cannot be sown either in the sky, or on the earth; neither is It known by the practice of Raja Yoga.

The Atman is neither with support, nor is It without support. I who am the Atman have become one with the supreme Brahman.

रूपं न रसं न स्पर्श गन्द देहू
दुयी न दयस् छु केवलोऽहम्
जीवो न जीवात् वार्ता न वार्तात्
कर्ता सु ओंकार परं ब्रह्म सोऽहम्॥९

*Rūpam na rasam na sparśa ganda dehū
duyi na dayas chu kevalo'ham
jīvo na jīvāt vārtā na vārtāt
kartā su oṃkāra
param brahma so'ham. (9)*

रूपं, *rūpam*—form; रसं, *rasam*—taste; स्पर्श, *sparśa*—touch; गन्द, *ganda*—smell; देहू, *dehū*—body; दुयी, *duyi*—two; दयस्, *dayas*—slave; केवलोऽहम्, *kevalo'ham*—alone; जीवो, *jīvo*—life; जीवात्, *jīvāt*—living beings; वार्ता, *vārtā*—speech; वार्तात्, *vārtāt*—speaker; कर्ता, *kartā*—doer, Master; ओंकार, *oṃkāra*—Om.

The Atman has no form and no taste; no touch, smell or body.

The Atman is not two; nor is It a slave (to the senses). I (who am the Atman) am alone, indivisible.

Without the Atman, there is no life and no living beings; no speech and no speakers.

It alone is the real Master, Controller of all actions; It is Om (the manifesting sound of Īśvara). I who am the Atman have become one with the supreme Brahman.

इडा न पिङ्गला सच ब्रह्मनाडी
स्वयं सु उपाया सुषुम्नाऽहमेव
अनाहत अनामय सु तोरियावस्था
आनन्द पद सु परम्ब्रह्म सोऽहम्॥१०

*Idā na piṅgalā saca brahmanāḍī
svayam su upāyā suṣumnā'hameva
anāhata anāmaya su toriyāvasthā
ānanda pada su
parambrahma so'ham. (10)*

इडा, *idā*—*Idā Nāḍī*, a mystical nerve in the spinal column; पिङ्गला, *piṅgalā*—*Piṅgalā Nāḍī*, another mystical nerve in the spinal

column; ब्रह्मनाडी, *brahmanāḍī*—Brahma or Suṣumnā Nāḍī, through which the awakened spiritual energy rises; स्वयं, *svayam*—I myself; उपाया, *upāyā*—solution; सुषुम्नाहमेव, *suṣumnā'hameva*—I myself am the Suṣumnā Nāḍī; अनाहत, *anāhata*—unhurt, not wounded; अनामय, *anāmaya*—without defect, perfect; तोरियावस्था, *toriyāvasthā*—the state of Turiya, or the fourth state of being; आनन्द, *ānanda*—joy, bliss; पद, *pada*—state.

Nāḍī becomes opened, Brahman is realized.

I myself am the right method by which the Suṣumnā Nāḍī becomes opened. I indeed am also the Suṣumnā Nāḍī.

The Atman cannot be wounded and It is without any defect; It is known in the state of Turiya (superconscious state).

This is the state of supreme Bliss. I who am the Atman have become one with the supreme Brahman. □

The Idā and Piṅgalā Nāḍīs cannot reveal the Atman; only when the Suṣumnā

(concluded)

Editor's note:

In the PB's April '96 issue we had published Ms Dar's 'Life of Devi Roop Bhavani'. Our footnote to it was an abridged version of Dar's letter to us. Due to editorial error, this note has created the impression that Sri Jankinath Kaul ('Kamal')'s *Bhavānī Nāma Sahasra Stutiḥ* too provided material for Dar's work. This isn't so, as Ms Dar in her letter below explains while clarifying some mistakes in the article pointed out by sharp readers:

Dehra Dun
1st May '96

Respected Swami,

...in response...I am sending you corrections in the article 'The Life of Devi Roop Bhavani' (PB, April '96).

1. Hara Parvat should be actually Hārī Parvat as Hārī in Kashmiri means Maina. (p. 291; column 1, 10th line.)

2. Wherever 'Ju' alone has appeared, it should actually be Madhav Ju. (There is a misprint in 3 places—p. 292: column 1, line 19 and column 2, line 4; and p. 293, column 1, line 40.)

3. The author would like to inform the readers that the first volume in English on Divine Mother Roop Bhavani was Sri Trilokinath Dhar's pioneering work, *Rupa Bhawani—Life, Teachings and Philosophy*, published in Srinagar in 1977 by All India Saraswat Cultural Organization.

4. Sri Jankinath Kaul's work, *Bhavānī Nāma Sahasra Stutiḥ*, was not a source material for this work, but was used to understand the legends relating to Sharika Bhagavati and Her Peetha at Hārī Parvat.

5. Lastly, the author would like to say that this work was done in a spirit of devotion and reverence for Divine Mother; and she craves forgiveness for errors unknowingly made.

With humble pranams,

Sincerely,

Aparna

Guru Gobind Singh: A Saint-Soldier

MS. JASBIR KAUR AHUJA

'When there is no other course open to man, it is but righteous to unsheathe the sword,' stated Guru Gobind Singh in his Zafarnama, a long letter in Persian verse sent to Emperor Aurangzeb, reprimanding him on his acts of treachery. This and other writings of the Guru show that he was a spiritual giant, but could take to arms effectively when the occasion demanded.

Ms. Ahuja, a senior lecturer in English at Patiala, draws our attention to the multi-faceted personality of Guru Gobind Singh and his role in shaping the Sikh religion.

In the galaxy of spiritual heroes, Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, occupies a prominent place. The social and political conditions of the time turned him not only into a soldier but also into a political hero. He himself revealed the purpose of his advent in his autobiographical poem *The Vichitra Natak*, where he says that God spoke to him thus:

I establish thee as My son, that thou spread my path. Go and instruct men in Righteousness and the Moral Law, and make people desist from evil.

(Chaupai, Ch. VI, 29)

Understand this, ye holy men, I assumed human form for this alone: to spread religion, to protect the saints and destroy all who are wicked.

(Chaupai, Ch. VI, 43)

It was the seventh day of the bright half of the month of Poh, Samvat 1723 (AD 1666) that the tenth Satguru (teacher and preacher of Truth) was born at Patna in Bihar. In his autobiography he traces his descent from Lav, the son of Lord Rama. Many wonderful stories are told of his childhood. He would take a little boat and row in the river Ganga. He would divide his friends into two groups and enjoy mock fights between them. He would shoot with a pellet bow and train young boys in the art of archery and the use

of other arms.

When Guru Gobind Singh was seven years old, as desired by his father Guru Tegh Bahadur he came to Anandpur Sahib with all the members of his family. After some days, a deputation of Pandits from Kashmir came to Anandpur Sahib, met the ninth Guru and narrated the cruel acts of injustice inflicted upon the Hindus by the Moghul governor. The Hindus were offered a choice between conversion to Islam and death. They sought the help of the Guru, who became silent and absorbed in deep thought. At that time, Guru Gobind Singh, then only a child of about nine, was playing nearby. He asked his father the reason for his silence. The father explained that those helpless people had come from Kashmir and had no one to protect them and their religion. The sacrifice of a great and brave soul was needed. The little child immediately said, 'Who can be more brave and greater than you? Please have mercy on them and arrange to do whatever is necessary to protect the Hindu Dharma.'

Guru Tegh Bahadur was pleased to hear this and told the visiting delegation, 'Go ye and tell the Governor that if our Guru and Guide Tegh Bahadur can be persuaded to take the lead, all others will follow. If not, we too will stick to our ancient faith.' Through the Governor the Guru's reply was reported to Aurangzeb, who summoned

him to Delhi. There Aurangzeb asked him either to embrace Islam or to face death. The Guru replied, 'No prophet on earth could convert the entire world to his religion. My religion is the most dear to me. I am not afraid of death.' On his refusal to embrace Islam, the Guru was sentenced to death. The site chosen for his execution was the Chandni Chowk in Delhi where the famous

Guru Tegh Bahadur was pleased to hear this and told the visiting delegation, 'Go ye and tell the Governor that if our Guru and Guide Tegh Bahadur can be persuaded to take the lead, all others will follow. If not, we too will stick to our ancient faith.'

Gurudwara Sri Sis Ganj Sahib now stands. The Guru started reciting hymns from the Japuji Sahib, and told the executioner to use his sword for execution when he would bow his head before the Almighty after saying his last prayers. Guru Tegh Bahadur thus died a hero's death. His execution strengthened the resistance against Aurangzeb's religious fanaticism.

When Guru Gobind Singh was told that no one came forward to protest on the day of execution because of the fear of death, he declared that he would lay the foundation of the Khalsa Panth and train its members to sacrifice everything for the right cause.

Son of martyr Guru Tegh Bahadur and the great grandson of martyr Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Gobind Singh laid at the altar of the Almighty all that he could call his own—his mother, all his four sons and even his own life—for the freedom of all including those who considered themselves his sworn enemies.

He was destined to fight the Rajput vassals of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in the Shivalik hills, and later, the forces of Aurangzeb himself. Though victorious in

most of these encounters, the Guru did not build an empire or acquire an inch of anyone's land, for he believed that, in a battle, success is achieved only when no one is defeated!

In his family life, Guru Gobind Singh was an ideal son. He understood the greatness of the character of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, who was one of God's own saints, a redeemer of humanity in distress. Guru Gobind Singh was a dutiful son to his mother, Mata Gujari Deviji, a remarkable lady endowed with a noble personality and a spirit of sacrifice to uphold the ideals of her husband and of her son. Guru Gobind Singh was an ideal husband and father as well. He had four sons who too were heroes and martyrs. All the four sons made great sacrifices to uphold their principles and religion in their boyhood and early youth.

Guru Gobind Singh had a multi-faceted personality. According to Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, President, Sahitya Academy, and a National Professor of Humanities,

Such a unique combination of manifold virtues in so many walks of life would be exceedingly difficult to find. Guru Gobind Singh was in the first instance a saint who had dedicated himself to God, a God-intoxicated philosopher. He was such a sincere Lover of Man that he wanted to see all man-made differences created by barriers of formal caste to be obliterated from society. Religion he wanted to bring to the masses in its simplest form, without any ritualistic obscurantism, and in this he fully succeeded at least so far as the Sikh community was concerned.¹

To quote Dr. Gopal Singh, 'He had to fight both the Hindus and the Muslims and yet both Muslims and Hindus also fought

1. Dr. Gopal Singh, *Thus Spake the Tenth Master*, Introduction, (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1978), p. xxvii.

alongside of him. Even in the heat of battle, he refused to inculcate hatred against the religious persecution of any of his adversaries. "The Hindu temple and the Muslim mosque cry out to the same God," he said. "Men are the same all over, though in appearance they seem so different." One of his devout disciples, Bhai Kanaihya, when asked why he was ministering water to the wounded on the battlefield without any distinction of friend and foe, is said to have answered, "My Guru has instructed me thus: To see only the face of the Beloved in all." And it is a fact of history that although emperor Aurangzeb had given the Guru every conceivable cause for grievance against his House, the Guru had helped his pious eldest son, Bahadur Shah, in the battle of succession....²

Thus, though a matchless warrior, he always remained a saint at heart. He said, 'If there is one God, then there is also one man,' and prayed, 'O God of all denominations, greetings to Thee.'

'His creation of Khalsa in 1699 is an event of such world-wide significance that Arnold Toynbee has called it the precursor and forerunner of Lenin's communist party two centuries later in history: an idealistic minority fighting, with the weapons of the adversary, in the name and for the sake of majority, obliterating all distinctions of caste, nationality, status and sex.... Open diplomacy and shared democracy were indeed the hall-marks of Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa, and not secret manoeuvre for power or self-perpetuation or an imposed system, howsoever good the intentions or quick the end-results. The means, according to Guru Gobind Singh, determined the quality of ends.'³

There is something unique in his concept of the Khalsa, for he calls them his body and soul (Pind Paran), and even his very life

(Jaan Ki Jaan). Guru Gobind Singh convinced all the devotees that no god or goddess would descend from heaven to give protection to the downtrodden masses. He asked them to assemble at Anandpur Sahib on the occasion of Baisakhi of the year 1699. When, at his call, five Sikhs offered their heads in surrender, Guru Gobind Singh baptized them by administering *amrit* pre-

Though victorious in most of these encounters, the Guru did not build an empire or acquire an inch of anyone's land, for he believed that, in a battle, success is achieved only when no one is defeated!

pared with a double-edged sword (*khanda*). They were known as the 'Chosen Five' and the Satguru addressed them thus, 'There is no difference between you and me....' They were given a common surname, 'Singh', and were called Khalsa. But they were Khalsa of the Lord-God, 'Wahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa'. It is written in the Sarab Loh Granth:

Khalsa Akal Purakh ki Pauj

Pragti Khalsa Parmatam Ki Mauj.

Khalsa is the army of the Eternal Lord raised by Him out of His pleasure.

Their distinguishing features were their unshaven beard, unshorn hair with a turban, an iron bangle, a sword dangling on the left, an underwear for the loins (Kachhara) and a comb in the hair. This was their military uniform and they all had the common surname, Singh. They were meant to be legions of the Timeless God, commissioned to establish the rule of Dharma on land (Dharma Chalavan) and to uproot all evil (Dushat Saban Ko Mool Uparan). The Guru himself set an perfect example. He sacrificed his all for the cause. He even guaranteed them ultimate victory if they did not yield to mundane temptations. He made it clear that a true Khalsa is one in whose heart the Perfect Light shines. Such a one, with God's

2. *Ibid.*, pp. vii-viii.

3. *Ibid.*, p. viii.

Light shining within, alone could illumine his surroundings and be a Khalsa of the Guru's conception. He was to live and behave as a saint in his dealings with people at large, and as a soldier among the Khalsa for the service and protection of the humble, the needy and the oppressed, and as a scourge to the evil doer.

Guru Gobind Singh held his 'Chosen Five'—the Khalsa of the Lord—in so high an esteem that he knelt before them and asked them to initiate him into the Khalsa Panth in the same way as he had done to them. The Guru was thus administered Amrit in the same manner, and given the surname 'Singh' (previously his name was Gobind Rai). The Guru thus became a Khalsa of the Lord (Wahe Guru), having the same status as the Chosen Five.

The Khalsa with God's Light shining within was meant to be a global society. They were not to form a separate denomination, as that was totally against the Guru's concept of universal brotherhood (*Ek hi Saroop Sabai ek Jot Janbo...*).

According to a Persian historian, Ghulam Mauhajuddin, the following proclamation was made by the Satguru in a document sent to the Emperor:

Let all embrace one creed and obliterate differences of religions. Let the Hindus, who believe in four different castes and who have different rules for their guidance, abandon them all, and adopt the one form of adoration, and become brothers. Let none deem himself superior to another....Let men of the four castes receive my baptism, eat out of one dish, and feel no disgust or contempt for one another.⁴

As pointed out by Dr. Fauja Singh, 'The creation of the Khalsa was the crowning event of Guru Gobind Singh's life from the

standpoint of both organization and ideology....Ideologically the creation of the Khalsa aimed at a well-balanced combination of the ideals of Bhakti and Sakti, of moral and spiritual excellences, and militant valour and heroism of the highest order.'⁵

They were taught to believe that the Khalsa was under the special control and protection of God. And wherever even five pious Sikhs assemble, the Guru would be with them. They were expected to salute one another with *Wahe Guru Ji ka Khalsa, Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh*, 'The Lord's is the Khalsa, the Lord's is the victory.' This was meant to remind them that they were knighted as God's soldiers to carry out His mission and that victory was theirs.

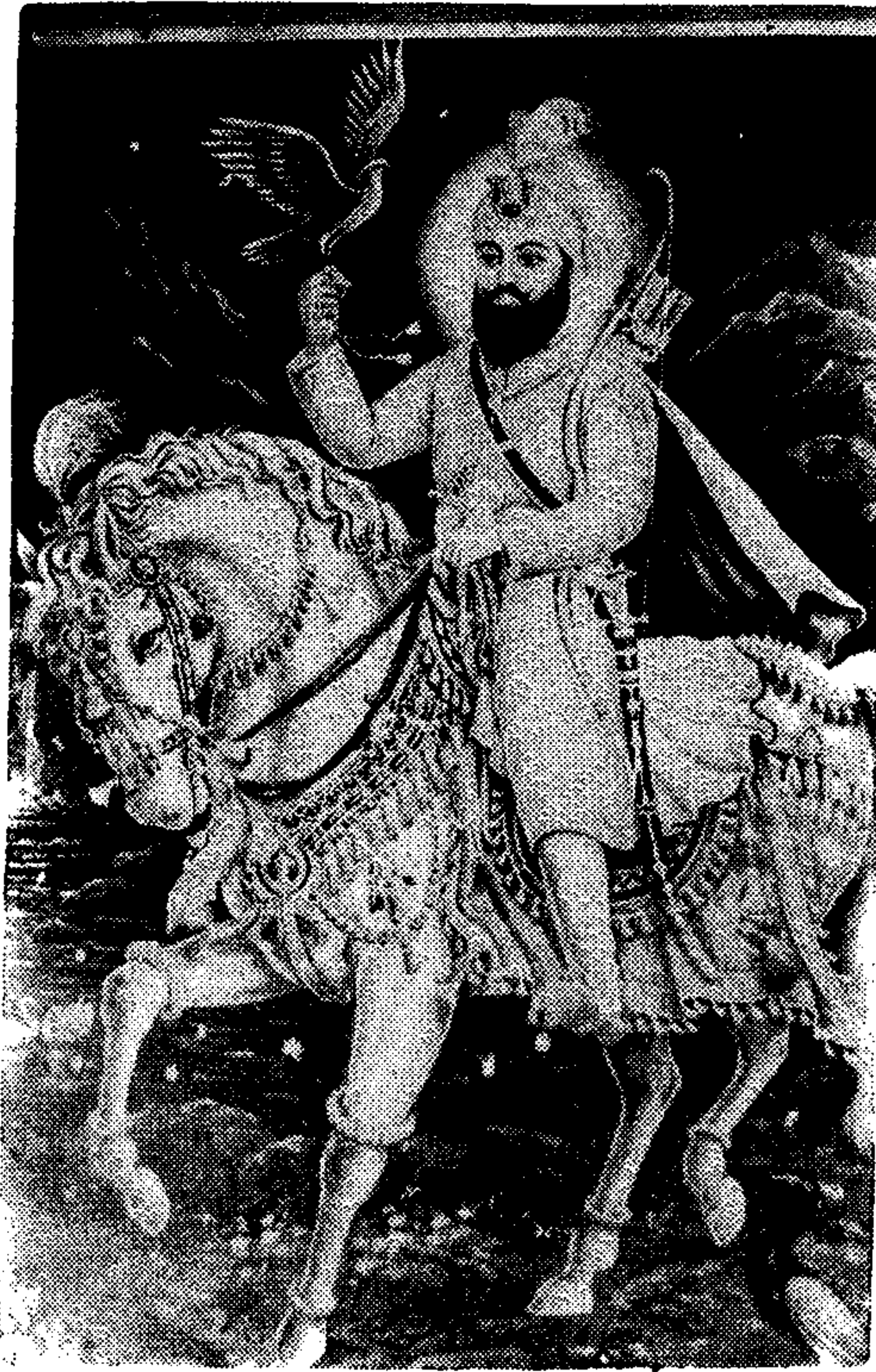
'But the Singhs were not to be merely soldiers. It was imperative that they must at the same time be saints, deeply devoted to God, singing His hymns as composed by the Gurus, observing the daily religious discipline prescribed in the *rahit* of the Khalsa and bearing a high moral character. There was no contradiction between the twin ideals of soldiering and saintliness. In fact, these were complementary to each other. Spiritual and moral values had to be protected with military strength, if they were to be saved for humanity. In the same way, military strength needed to be guided and directed by goals set by high moral and spiritual values, otherwise there was a likelihood of its being misused.'⁶

'The spirit that is working behind the history of this ideological freeing of a people has been that of Guru Gobind Singh. He was one of the greatest personalities of India; and India as well as the rest of the world have both to know him and to learn to honour him. A study of his great life and personality, and all that he achieved within the short

4. Harbans Singh Doabia, *The Supreme Truth*, (November-December, 1973), pp. 9-10.

5. Dr. Fauja Singh, Essay entitled 'Development of Sikhism Under the Gurus' in *Sikhism* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1969), pp. 31-2.

6. *Ibid.*



Guru Gobind Singhji Maharaj

span of forty-two years that he lived, makes one feel very certain that he had very few peers to equal him. And he was something more, with many more facets to his character than most of these heroes of India. He was a religious leader, but from his boyhood he manifested also a rare vision of the realities and problems of the life he had to live in a way which marked him off from all lesser men. He grew up into both a thinker and a fighter, a man of good council and decision in peace and war, and a man of prowess in battle in both victories and reverses. He combined in himself both a poet and a man of devotion who was suffused with the spirit of God and at the same time he was a finished archer and wielder of the sword....

'And he had the most uncommon sense which enabled him to rise above barriers of caste and convention. His was the soul of a poet which appreciated the great myths of the Hindu Puranas; and as a soldier of God who had dedicated himself to a God who is forever fighting the forces of evil, he understood the value of the good and was a relentless fighter in the Army of the Good against Evil. He was a philosopher to whom the essentials of faith and religion alone had a value, and who could easily come to the basic core of religion in life.'⁷ But his ultimate aim was to maintain peace for humanity.

'He had a deep knowledge of the lore and literature of the Sikh Order, of the inspired writings of all the great teachers of the Order, and he brought out, with an assistant (Bhai Mani Singh) helping him to prepare it, the definitive final redaction of the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth, as standardized by the scholars, devotees, and scribes of Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo in district Bhatinda) where he established his headquarters as soon as he got a little respite from war. He was a linguist of rare attainments, with a thorough knowledge of his mother tongue, eastern Punjabi of the Manjha and its other dialects, besides Lahnde-de-Boli or the dialect of western Punjab; of the Braj Bhasha form of western Hindi; of the Sadhukkadi Boli or Hindustani as current among the Sadhus or wandering mendicants, Hindu and Muslim, of North India; of the Rekhta or Mixed Dialect of Hindi and Persian as a sort of incipient Hindustani or Urdu; besides the developing literary Hindustani of the Hindus, which later came to be known as 'Hindi'; and Persian, which was the court and official language, and language of literature and culture of north India Moghuls and other Muslims in India. In all

7. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, *Guru Gobind Singh* (Chandigarh: Punjab University, 1967), pp. xxi-xxii.

these forms of speech, he made original contributions of very high value which are enshrined in his collected writings. These writings of the Guru form a sort of Apocrypha to the Guru Granth. The long letter in Persian verse (Zafarnama, i.e. the Letter of Victory), which he wrote and sent to Aurangzeb in protest against his policy of harassing and persecuting his Hindu subjects, was taken quite seriously by the Moghul Emperor himself (whose own Persian style had a high distinction), both for the subject matter and for its language.⁸

'A superb poet of Braj, Punjabi and Persian, there is no metre known to Indian prosody that the Guru has not employed with perfect ease and mastery of diction, nor a metaphor that does not invoke the atmosphere most appropriate to the occasion. How vast is his canvas of experience and interest, how liberal and catholic his outlook, how chivalrous and moral the sentiments he inspires! And how well he can embrace both (often contradictory) facts of reality in his poetry!

Greetings, O the Moon of moons!
Greetings, O the Sun of suns!
Greetings, O Abysmal Darkness!
O the Destroyer, the Giver of life!⁹

According to the Guru, God is not only Almighty and full of Grace, but also the creator and annihilator of evil. 'Why He creates evil is not so that we accept its validity or inevitability, but that we negate and fight it out both for the exercise of our spiritual muscle as well to establish the goodness of God. For, in the ultimate analysis, it is the Good that triumphs, not Evil. A seeming defeat suffered in the cause of Good does not detract from the goodness of God, nor a temporary victory won at the cost of moral

health. And that is what justifies God—and the Guru—both in history and eternity.'¹⁰

Guru Gobind Singh's 'Guru' not only brings us earthly power but also directs us from within to utilize it for the fulfilment of society as much as for one's own soul. If individuals or societies flout with impunity the Moral Law, in diverse ways God creates conditions for their ruin and destruction.

That is what makes Guru Gobind Singh and his concept of God so very relevant to society even today, when people are unravelling the mysteries of nature and controlling her forces as never before. But man was never more distant from man, nor the human soul ever so much in torment, afraid of itself as much as of its neighbour and society. The poor man's physical distress is being replaced now by the economic man's loneliness, greed, brutality, and loss of humanity.

And yet neither the Guru nor his God is self-centred or exclusive. God as conceived by Guru Gobind Singh is involved with and deeply concerned about the welfare of his creation. 'One must overpower oneself and not others,' says the Guru.

According to S. Harbans Singh, 'Apart from his historical role as the creator of a frame-work of high social and ethical values and an order dedicated to the principles of theistic belief and moral and heroic action, Guru Gobind Singh's personal splendour and aura are a unique phenomenon in the history of the world. It is difficult to imagine a genius more majestic, comprehensive and versatile. In the words of the Muslim historian, Syed Muhammad Halif, Guru Gobind Singh "was a law giver in the pulpit, a champion in the field, a King on his masnad, and a faqir in the society of the Khalsa."¹¹

No better tribute can be paid to Guru

10. *Ibid.*

11. S. Harbans Singh, *Life Story of Sri Satguru Gobind Singhji Maharaj* (Chandigarh: Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, 1966), p. 173.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. xxii-xxiii.

9. Dr. Gopal Singh, *Thus Spake the Tenth Master*, p. xi.

Gobind Singh than in the words of Swami Ranganathanandaji, who said, 'The tragedy which began with Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, continued and reached its highest intensity during the period of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, whose struggle, sacrifices and successes make him shine as the greatest tragic hero of later Indian history. His character, dedication, intellect, courage and, above all, compassion, mark him out as a born leader and saviour; in his life as well as in his death, he has been a beacon of light and hope to millions of his countrymen.'¹²

Let us conclude in the words of Suniti Kumar Chatterjee: 'Prophet, poet, soldier, philosopher, prince and recluse, Guru Gobind Singh is lovingly remembered for the

intense humanity and compassion of the ministry he introduced into the world. He carried out within the brief span of forty-two years a wide diversity of roles with extraordinary resources and purposefulness. Over the years, he has become a most eloquent symbol of all that is virile and positive in our religious tradition....(This symbol) is the centre of Sikh's memories of their origin and tradition, and a perennial source of inspiration for them. It still stimulates among them a peculiar kind of spiritual upsurge and they have always felt the presence of the Master soul among them. In the crucial moments of their recent history, the Lord of the white Hawk was as tangibly their hero and guiding spirit as he had always been since the time of his earthly existence.'¹³ □

12. Swami Ranganathananda, *Swami Vivekananda on Guru Gobind Singh* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1984), p. 2.

13. Dr. Gopal Singh, *Thus Spake the Tenth Master*, p. xxxi.

Sri Ramakrishna's Incarnation: A Study

(Continued from page 479)

So Sri Ramakrishna said to his disciple Mahendra Nath Gupta, 'Never feel that your own path alone is right and that the paths of others are wrong and full of errors. Hindus, Mussalmans, and Christians are going to the same destination by different paths. A man can realize God by following

his own path if his prayer is sincere.'¹⁷

The supreme Truth or ultimate Goal to which all religions point was again revealed to humanity by the ocean of compassion, Sri Ramakrishna. It is thus the beginning of a new text in the history of amity in plurality, religious harmony, and universal religion. □

17. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 562.

Ignorance is death, knowledge is life. Life is of very little value, if it is a life in the dark, groping through ignorance and misery.

—Swami Vivekananda

Is God a Mere Social Necessity?

KANWALJIT SINGH

'To expect of man, who is no more than a paltry speck in the Infinite Abyss, to rely exclusively upon his own potentialities without any reference to some Invisible Force would be simply absurd.'...The learned author of this article, from Ludhiana, Punjab, finds that faith in a transcendental God is immensely conducive to our wellbeing, and is the first condition of a happy life.

In Dostoevsky's *Karamazov Brothers*, Ivan Karamazov has to admit, 'Even if God doesn't exist, it would be necessary to invent him.' This statement of Mr. Karamazov obviously reduces God to a conception, a figment of human imagination, or to put it more deferentially, an idea. But that idea is so exalted, so sublime and so edifying as to move a flustered soul to mystic exaltation. It is that divine elixir of life by partaking of which one becomes master of the lower instincts that always bind man to the material dross. His lower ego is sublimated. He no longer thinks of life as a fortuitous mark on the book of the Universe, destined to be blotted off with the gales of time. He is inwardly convinced of the presence of a higher Law, a sort of moral order, a harmony, guiding the celestial spheres in their motions. And he begins to be conscious of the Spirit: the latent spark of divinity implanted in his being.

However, one thing Mr. Ivan's afore-said statement suggests: man's inalienable attachment to God. He cannot dissociate himself from the idea of God. His mortality and his helplessness in face of adversely inclined fate forces him to accept God as a reality, a supreme cosmic Force, omnipotent and omniscient that superintends the movements of starry constellations and those of mortal creatures as well who tread this earth.

To expect of man who is no more than a paltry speck in the Infinite Abyss, to rely exclusively upon his own potentialities without any reference to some Invisible Force, would be simply absurd. Even an avowed sceptic has to invoke God at least once in life, to derive moral strength, for morality and Godliness are in my opinion synonymous. His very nature compels man to have faith in God. Death, disease, suffering and natural calamities he is subject to, have always buffeted his dauntless breast so as to make him totter into prostration before some Omnipotent Power whose implacable decrees, he fondly thinks, his supplications can alter.

Apart from this, there is a psychological fact which cannot and should not be overlooked. There is always present in the human mind an inherent tendency to feel dissatisfaction at 'what is' and to ponder upon 'what ought to be'. Nor can it be divested of its yearning for the Unknown, so long as in the form of past experiences it is incessantly presented with stimuli. It wants to go beyond the tangible phenomenon, even beyond that 'beyond'; the moment our mind loses its progressive urge, it stagnates into inertia. We so often use involuntarily, even in simple household matters, such words as 'Oh God', 'Only God knows', partly to relax our overwrought nerves and partly to lift ourselves, though momentarily, above mundaneness.

And this dissatisfaction with senses and the longing for the Beyond, for the Unknown, presupposes a destination, even though that Destination be imperviously veiled behind some 'nebula'. If the knowledge of God or the Unknown constitutes that destination at which the subtle operations of mind or rather consciousness aim,

Continuous recital of His name and praying not only exalts the human consciousness above mundaneness, but also strengthens the will to combat all the adversely poised forces which tend, as it were, to crush down the individual and against which he finds himself utterly helpless.

then mind can rest assured on a vague possibility of finding a dependable anchorage amidst the encompassing gloom.

For therapeutic purposes too, this idea of the all-pervasiveness and omnipotence of God can be applied. A few days ago I did happen to find my eyes ravenously perusing an article published in a journal under the title of 'Dr. God'. To my great joy and no less wonder, I found therein countenanced a rationalistic faith in the Supreme Being—a practical affirmation of faith quite analogous to Kant's practical reason exalted above 'pure reason'. If sadness and tension, peculiar to modern life, is the underlying cause of diverse maladies and mental derangements man is subject to, then the finest remedy would undoubtedly be the removal of that tension. And God is the best medicine that can be administered to a sullen soul.

Not only does faith in Omnipresent Reality ensure the mitigation of that tension but also implicitly effects a catharsis more effectively than the greatest poetry in the world. Continuous recital of His name and praying not only exalts the human con-

sciousness above mundaneness, but also strengthens the will to combat all the adversely poised forces which tend, as it were, to crush down the individual and against which he finds himself utterly helpless. To a sort of stoic immunization this self-surrender leads the mind. And man brings himself, as a result, to endure, to withstand the stark and sombre realities which he should otherwise find awfully difficult to cope with. From what I have written afore, it may safely be inferred that faith is immensely conducive to life and that an unflinching espousal to the presence of a Divine Idea, governing the cosmic spheres into a rhythmic harmony, is the first condition of happy life. However sceptical notions respecting the existence of a trans-empirical Spirit we may hold, it is—be it noted—highly salutary, nay rather ennobling, to force the conscious mind into belief in an all-pervasive Force.

After this justification of theism from the pragmatic standpoint, we may now proceed to assert that there is some cosmic Force that exists independently of our mind—which is too feeble and gross to apprehend 'It'. For the comprehension of Transcendental Reality, intuition is the best and in fact the only means (as opposed to logical reasoning) which, of necessity, has to progress with the aid of senses, and the knowledge yielded by the former is more reliable.

Some of the greatest thinkers of the West, such as Plato, Pascal, Shaw and Bergson too exalted intuition above reason. Were we assured that life on earth is nothing but a fortuitous happening and tangible phenomenon, the 'final end', would we then direct all our energies to ruthless and brute sensuality? Would we be able to quell all our finer emotions and belie Kant's assertion, 'Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe—the starry heavens above and the moral law within me.'?

The moral law within us and the capacity of man to transcend the senses to reach the higher realm of spirit presupposes something higher than the senses. Even mind, subservient as it is to lower instincts, shows, now and then, an itching desire to liberate itself from the snares of the senses. If there were not engrafted in us a latent consciousness of a Spirit that is higher than senses, and even mind, we would certainly be content to live with all our energies concentrated upon the physical self and to alienate ourselves from such notions as lead to the corroboration of a spiritual life.

In as much as we are endowed with finer emotions and sentiments and even our consciousness, though often wedded to the senses, tends at times to recoil from a life glutted with sensual pleasures, we cannot think of eliminating these emotions and deeming physical life as the 'ultimate end'.

If there is in each of us an irrepressible urge towards the superphysical state of life, if mind cannot be satisfied with a life given solely to physical enjoyments, what would our efforts at leading a spiritual life amount to if we were convinced of the non-existence of a Pure Self in whom we mean to take refuge? Can we deny the human spirit that can fiddle with the direst torturing body can be subjected to in full possession of its senses? Can we omit the fact that there were men like Jesus, Socrates, and others who suffered their bodies to undergo extreme physical torments while keeping, as it were, their indomitable spirit unsubdued by the pangs of the flesh? If such men did not have faith in the indestructible spirit and were unable to liberate consciousness from senses, would they have shown the same courage and tenacity as they did in face of death?

For a man whose sole aim in life is to gratify the senses and to whom body is

everything, it is extremely difficult to root out of his consciousness the fear of death. But a spiritual man thinks of death as a natural occurrence. He has, as Socrates says, the greatest hatred for his body. To him body is only the means, spirit being the end. Furthermore we all feel, at least once in life, the presence of a Divine Mystery guiding us towards the Goal and forcing us to believe that an order prevails in the movement of heavenly spheres, that a vital cosmic rhythm is accountable for every occurrence that takes place within the bosom of the infinite universe, from the collision of the stars to the tender cries of a newborn babe. The harmony which nature's workings, notwithstanding the abundance of facts that bespeak to the contrary, exhibit is nothing less than a miracle. The sun, moon and the stars; the creatures treading the earth, seem to be bound by one eternal creative Principle.

One Life manifests itself through a multiplicity of forms and constitutes the substratum of whatever breathes in the invulnerable air. Even the predatory instincts native to every creature, founded as they are upon equally powerful impulse of self-preservation, are merely the instruments whereby Life keeps her balance lest It be deemed biased to a particular species. Man is the only living being who is capable of comprehending the movement and flux of one Life through all the forms and thereby effecting, as the Buddha had done, his identification with his fellow creatures.

However, one might scruple to subscribe to an anthropomorphized conception of God, engaged in arbitrary government of the Universe and deriving sadistic delight from inflicting untold cruelties upon mortal creatures who look up to Him for protection. It is shocking to think of such a despotic Deity. Nor can we attribute the suffering of humanity to the willfulness of God. We are bound to reap what we sow.

That some such perennial Substance exists of which the knowledge could move Pascal and other saints to emotional ecstasy and to a fervid faith in the Unseen, it is difficult to deny. Even if the visions of saints, seers and prophets be regarded, as most men tinged in more or less degree with modern materialism would be apt to do, as hallucinations or the emanations of their morbid consciousness, the mere possibility of the subjection of human psyche to hallucinations bespeaks the presence of a higher and transsensuous Phenomenon.

We have to admit of the experiences higher, vaster and nobler than the normal ones under the sway of which mind works. Can we reject the vision of St. Paul, Buddha's enlightenment, Sri Ramakrishna's triumph over man's lower nature, and prophet Mohammed's unshakable faith in one Omnipotent Reality and his mystic communion with Gabriel and the subsequent compilation of Koran as illusions? Were the aforesaid great personalities morbid intellects seeking refuge in some ethereal reality so as to escape from the hardships of life? What visions soever the great religious leaders are said to have had while endeavouring to solve the riddle of existence, cannot and should not be, abnormal though they might seem to the ordinary intellects enmeshed in the life of the senses, attributed to their undeveloped psyches. The capacity of transcending the senses, pleasure, pain and body is nothing less than the supreme act of genius and all genius is but the embodiment of nature's supreme urge to perfection.

If Vivekananda could be made to jettison his nascent agnosticism by Sri Ramakrishna's firm affirmation of the existence of God; if martyrs of religion like Guru Arjan could calmly face death, having brought themselves to a complete submission to the will of the Almighty, there must be some luminous Noumenon, infinite flow of con-

sciousness of which what is apprehended through senses appears as a reflection and whose knowledge can be gained by other means than those whereby the knowledge of phenomenal reality is derived.

Nor can we discredit the subtle faculties—such as intuition etc.—, which are employed to gather knowledge in areas where, as the Upanishads say, senses fail to penetrate and the knowledge supplied by them (senses) alone less valid than when they are coupled with logical reasoning. It is only through self-expansion and the dissolution of lower ego, that one can experience God. With the understanding of the identification of Self with Brahman, the web of duality fades. And human spirit soars like a

...Nor should we reckon the Transcendental Reality dependent upon man, and if we are to love and adore God, we can't do it as of pragmatic necessity but considering Him a Trans-social Necessity; the only Refuge in whom we must trust, the All-Pervading One.

bird into the empyrean crying, just like Shankara in moments of ecstasy, 'That thou art.' Nor should we reckon the Transcendental Reality dependent upon man, and if we are to love and adore God, we can't do it as of pragmatic necessity but considering Him a Trans-social Necessity; the only Refuge in whom we must trust, the All-Pervading One. □

If but once He should give man a taste of divine joy, then man would not care to lead a worldly life.

—*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 385

Quantum Theory, Unity, and Diversity

PROF. GEOFFREY CHEW

Vedanta students will find the following piece very interesting both because of Prof. Chew's brilliant presentation of a subtle subject and also because of the theme, viz. unity of the perceptibly diverse Universe. The Professor was one of the speakers at the Ahimsa Conference on 'Finding Unity in Diversity' referred to in our introductory note under 'Religion and Diversity' in last month's PB. He is also the recipient of the Orlando Lawrence Award for the development of the Bootstrap Theory of nuclear particles.

I see my assignment today as somehow to relate quantum theory to the unity and diversity that other speakers are considering. I'm very unsure that the unity of the universe which is implied by quantum mechanics has relevance to the subject of this meeting. But Prof. Mehta felt that parallels might be stimulating. So I'm going to proceed with a selection of observations drawn from my research in quantum cosmology. You have to be the judge whether there is in fact any relevance.

Science is frequently described as objective, visualizing the universe as made of separate objects, each with a location in space and time. Some objects are capable of observing other objects whose independent existence may be verified by more than one observer. The scientific paradigm of objectivity, or, as I will call it today often, objective reality, is epitomized by Einstein's famous insistence that *the moon is really there*.

But is the moon really there? Does the moon have a scientifically, precisely definable meaning independent of surroundings that include observers looking at the moon? It is ironical that, development of quantum theory by 20th-century science—a development which received major contributions from Einstein—has downgraded the notion of 'moon' to no more than an approximation. Thereby it seems to have undermined science itself. Objective reality has lost foundational status. Science now finds it neces-

sary to explain how objective reality can be an enormously accurate conceptual tool for representing many aspects of the universe—when *really there is no* objective reality. Einstein's attitude to the moon has become perceived as inadequate.

It was atomic investigations at the century's beginning that led to scientific overthrow of the objective reality paradigm, replacing Newtonian style classical mechanics by the more successful but non-objective quantum mechanics. You may well ask how science has managed to survive disappearance of objectivity as a paradigm. The survival has been based on the recognition, as an essential aspect of science, of uncertainty, error in any observation. No observation is exactly reproducible. This unavoidable feature of science, overlooked until the advent of quantum mechanics, has now become keenly appreciated. Reproducibility of experiments is now accorded a probabilistic, not an absolute, meaning.

Truth becomes no more than a 'highly probable' anticipated outcome of a proposed observation. If you look for the moon tonight at an appropriate time, and if there is no fog, you will *probably* see it. The statement that I am standing in the front of this room, or that you are seated in chairs does not represent absolute truth—neither does the statement that you are different from me. Your electrons and mine are only approximately distinguishable. In denying objectiv-

ity quantum mechanics denies absolute status to your individuality. The only *individual* is the *entire universe*. It's perfectly possible to work as a quantum physicist without attending to this unity mystery.

In the forties my teacher, Enrico Fermi, was a superbly original thinker—not at all interested in the ideas that I am emphasizing today. It was during his fifties, while I was applying Fermi's ideas to the structure of nuclear particles, that I became aware that within every particle there is a sense in which every other particle resides. I was amazed that this essential aspect of quantum theory had not been emphasized by my teachers. Even today, in the university courses, quantum theory is usually prag-

You may well ask how science has managed to survive disappearance of objectivity as a paradigm. The survival has been based on the recognition, as an essential aspect of science, of uncertainty, error in any observation.

matically presented to graduate students as a computational tool. But now the really interesting aspects also receive attention.

Physics students today are very much aware of the aspects of quantum theory that caused so much distress to Einstein. An idea that was specially precious to Einstein—and that turns out to be denied by quantum theory—is that, events unconnectable by signals whose velocity is limited by that of light are incapable of affecting each other. This idea is usually characterized as causality. The causality paradigm, which is an aspect of objective reality, was unquestioned at the turn of the century. Einstein felt obliged to reject quantum theory to the extent that it undermines causality.

Science survives what might seem total loss of foundation by focussing on special situations where quantum mechanics, by a mechanism called de-coherence, causes cer-

tain probabilities to be overwhelming. I'm not going to be able to explain to you how this mechanism of de-coherence works, but I will refer to it repeatedly because it is the key to understanding how so much of objective reality can survive in the face of quantum theory. With sufficient de-coherence, failure of causality becomes minuscule.

It is almost certain that if you close and then open your eyes, you will continue to see me standing here. You will find it difficult tonight to influence what you ate for breakfast this morning. Why? This enormous degree of certainty and causality is traceable to huge parameters that characterize both the present universe and this room. It is a general characteristic of quantum theory that huge parameters can by de-coherence lead to objective reality as an extremely accurate approximation. Your individuality stems in part from the large number of electrons that you carry within you and from the large ratio of your atomic nuclear masses to the electron mass. These numbers, while large, are nevertheless finite. The degree of your individuality is quantifiable and, on cosmological scale, as I shall elaborate, it is unimpressive.

The meaning of objective reality intertwines with the Newtonian meaning of space and time—a meaning accepted by Descartes among many others of course—and largely carried forward by Einstein. Quantum cosmology suggests that space and time enjoyed no significance at the very early stages of the universe, but gradually acquired meaning through quantum de-coherence as the universe expanded away from an epoch that has been called, somewhat vaguely, Big Bang. The central huge number underlying the de-coherence is the ratio of a parameter defined by the astronomer Hubble—a parameter roughly equivalent to what is the age of the universe. Ratio of this number to the value of Hubble's parameter at Big Bang—the measured present age of the universe—makes this ratio

about 10^{60} , which is easily large enough to endow the space-time concept with such accuracy that, for most purposes, present-day science can afford unquestioning acceptance.

Nevertheless, as soon as apriori meaning for space-time is accepted, a barrier is erected to appreciating the universe's quantum mechanical unity. This unity, impossible to ignore for the early universe, and incompatible with ideas of objectivity and observability, becomes obscured when space-time is adopted as under-pinning for thinking—whether scientific or otherwise. Thereby it inevitably bogs down in the Newtonian-Cartesian-Einsteinian track.

A provocative paradox that may have struck some of you involves the prefix 'di' in the word 'dialogue', which has been used to characterize this meeting. The prefix 'di' implies meaning for at least two distinguishable, although interacting, entities. Does it make sense for dialogue to consider indivisibility of the universe? Let me take this paradox as an excuse to approach language as one aspect of a late-stage universe, where approximately meaningful space-time has become a cornerstone of approximate objective reality. It is amusing to attempt a rudimentary connection of language with objective reality. When examined as a physical phenomenon, objective reality might be regarded as having three components that clash in principle, but then in practice can approximately co-exist when certain ratios are suitably large. The three components are: identity of object, communication between objects, and memory of communication.

Let me first consider *identity* of an object. A prerequisite to objectivity is that the distribution of matter within space-time, not be smooth but lumpy. The notion of *object* refers to spatially localized concentration of matter—such as your body—that tends to persist in time. It must be approximately true that the matter concentration is spa-

tially *here* and not *there*. The concentration furthermore must have a degree of permanence. The best understood quantum mechanical mechanisms for ordinary matter to become locally concentrated in stable configurations are electromagnetic and require high frequencies. Your identity, from the point of view of physics, and that of most objects that we encounter in daily life, stems from electromagnetic frequencies of about 10^{15} oscillations per second. It is the largeness of these frequencies that allows you to interact with me, without losing your sense of identity.

Objectivity, furthermore, implies capacity for one object to gently observe another, without the observer destroying the identity of the observee. Any observation must cause some change. But the change may be small. Usual mechanism of observation, even sonic, are electromagnetic; and may be gentle if the carrier frequencies are small compared to the identity frequencies. When you look at me, the frequencies you are employing are roughly one thousand times smaller than my identity frequencies. You change me and yourself by looking at me—but not by so much that identity is lost. I might add here that, also relevant to gentleness of observation is the total energy in the observation signal as opposed to the total energy of the object. X-ray frequencies are larger than my identity frequencies and I can be destroyed by X-rays. But major change in a portion of my body from X-ray observation need not obliterate my identity, if the portion is only a small fraction of the whole. So the subject is more complicated than my simple examples are suggestive.

The third component of objective reality is memory of observation by the observer. Memory is typically also electromagnetic, but may involve frequencies even lower than the observation frequencies and far below the identity frequencies. Clash between my three-component-picture of

objective reality is illustrated by the familiar idea that memory alters identity. Slightness of this alteration is essential to objective reality. Too strong a memory is destructive of identity.

Language might be regarded as an elaborate aspect of gentle observation memory—where roles of observer and observee repeatedly interchange. You observe my memory. I observe yours. You and I at the end of this verbal encounter will both be slightly changed. According to quantum theory, even if we don't talk, even if we don't look at each other, you affect me and I affect you. All aspects of the universe affect both of us. Our individual identities are illusory. there is one universe.

Over the past decade, while endeavouring to quantify objective reality through a quantum cosmological model....By the way, I'm struck listening to myself here, that what distinguishes, perhaps, my approach is the effort to quantify—I'm talking about exactly the same general ideas that I have a drive to convert these ideas into some numerical representation. I need numbers. I need to know how accurate it is that you are *there* and I'm *here*. (*Laughter*) In studying quantum cosmology I have learned to appreciate the importance within our universe—quite apart from electro-magnetism that dominates living matter—, (the importance) of four widely separated length scales. Wideness of separation between these scales seems to be a prerequisite for the space-time that underlies electro-magnetic objective reality.

(Although with these concluding thoughts I am pushing my mandate from Professor Mehta to an absurd extreme, I can't resist!)

I am showing here four scales, which have been called—given names—Planck Scale, Particle Scale, Lab Scale and Hubble Scale. I only put a familiar linked unit here: This Lab Scale is where we are. You function, for almost all of your thinking and

activities, very very close to this scale.

But quantum cosmology recognizes an enormous range of scales in the Universe, starting with the Planck Scale and going up to the Hubble Scale. The Hubble Scale is the scale that I have already referred to as (the scale) corresponding more or less to the distance that light can travel in the age of the Universe—that is often just called the size of the Universe.

According to quantum cosmology, the Hubble Scale is the only one that is changing. The other ratios remain fixed. And the way you are supposed to think about the expansion of the Universe is that the Hubble Scale started off with a big bang down here and then gradually increased. And it was not until the Hubble Scale passed what I have indicated as the Lab Scale here that Space-Time developed the meaning that we know, and that objective reality began to be meaningful. So you see how much of the Universe there was, in terms of its history, before any of these ideas began to make sense.

Now, I will close, remarking that the key to this picture is this remarkable ratio—this constant ratio between Particle Scale, Planck Scale, Lab Scale and Hubble Scale which sort of determines the structure. This number is totally mysterious. Nobody understands where it comes from. But it is a measurable number. And with it, it is possible to quantify the sort of questions that I have been presenting to you.

So, I will, in closing, simply re-emphasize my uncertainty about any usefulness for this meeting to consider the Unity of the Universe that is implied by quantum theory. Perhaps you will find it amusing that science now allows a computation, in principle, regarding how true it is that the moon is there!

I can only hope that these parallels will prove stimulating. □

Practical Vedanta

DIVISION OF KARMA

There was a terrible plague epidemic in Calcutta in 1899, which claimed innumerable lives. Many of the volunteers helping the patients were afraid, as some of them also became victims of the disease. However, Swami Vivekananda's resolve was as unfaltering as was his vow to serve humanity. He himself went to live in the slums to put heart into the people and encourage the volunteers. Not only did he inspire his band of disciples to minister to the patients but also had them clean the roads and drains.

These activities were not liked by some of the 'learned pandits'. They told Swamiji, 'You are not doing the right thing. You know very well that each individual has to bear the consequences of his or her evil action. Those that have done sinful deeds are suffering from plague. God is punishing them for their sins. By ministering to these patients you are becoming an obstacle to God's plan.'

To this Swamiji replied, 'Undoubtedly an individual has to suffer on account of evil actions. However, is it also not true that those that alleviate others' pain and suffering attain merit? As it is ordained for the plague victims to suffer on account of past evil actions, so also is it ordained that we should earn merit by alleviating their suffering. As such, our activities are not an obstacle to God's intention, but they are acts for earning merit.' On hearing this sage reply the 'learned ones' had no answer and went their way, wonderstruck that Vedanta can be made so practical.

A Child of the City *

V. RAMASWAMY

Patron Saint, Lewis Mumford, whose centenary is currently being celebrated, is closely connected with the growth of environmental consciousness in our country, says the author.

Lewis Mumford, whose birth centenary fell on 19 October 1995, may be seen as one of those who have enabled today's crystalizing environmental consciousness. Largely unknown in the field of public culture even in his native America, his 'organicist' philosophy was deeply ecological. His varied concerns converge on the problem of defining an ethic which would fuse the classical socialist values of justice and community with what we would today call environmental values. Born in Flushing, New York, Mumford was, in his own words, a child of the city. In an assiduously and single-mindedly pursued writing life, spanning over 60 years, Mumford wrote some 30 books, covering subjects as diverse as the history of cities, the history of machine technology, art and architectural criticism. He is most widely known for the books *The City in History* and *The Myth of the Machine: The Pentagon of Power*.

As early as 1930, we find him writing that the three main threats to modern civilization were the destruction of forest cover, the depletion of non-renewable resources, and the awesome destructive power of modern weaponry. His first major work, *Technics and Civilization* (1934), underlined the links between industrialization, the increasing intensity of energy use, and pollution.

Mumford recognized that ecological degradation was, at least in part, the outcome of a flawed value system which had 'missed the great lesson that both ecology and medicine teach—that man's great mission is not to conquer Nature by main force

but to co-operate with her intelligently and lovingly for his own purposes.' Ecological degradation, he believed, is inescapable in an economic system driven by the belief that quantitative production had no natural limits. Indeed modern technology is profoundly anti-ecological—'driven by the desire to displace the organic with the synthetic and the prefabricated', it exhibits a 'barely concealed hostility to living organisms, vital functions, organic associations.'

Mumford anticipated the alternate theorists of today. He was a critic of both capitalism and communism, holding them to be but two variants of a centralizing, destructive and violent system of production. But he did not wholly turn his back on modern technology, seeking instead to bend it to serve human and environmental needs.

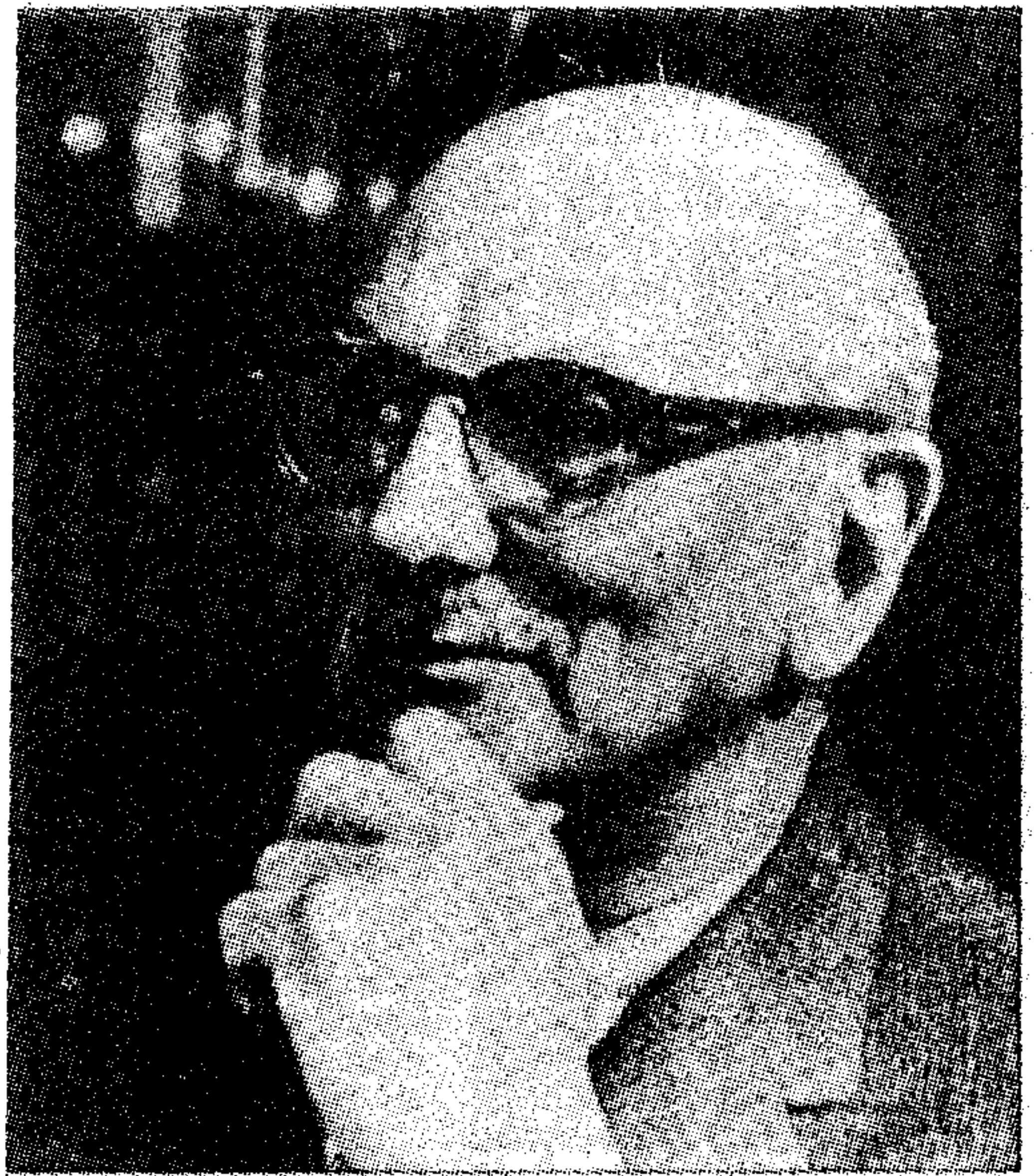
In an age of specialization, Mumford was a sociologist, philosopher, cultural historian, art and literary critic, and authority on architecture and city planning, a true Renaissance man. In 1923, Mumford was a founding member of the Regional Planning Association of America, an experimental group that paved the way for several projects in regional development, including the Tennessee Valley Authority. In 1932 Mumford began to write a column of architectural criticism, 'The Sky Line', for the *New Yorker*. Beginning from the time of his childhood walks in the city with his grandfather, his 'manhatta', in all its resources, was his true university.

Mumford was deeply influenced in his youth by the work and thought of Patrick Geddes, the eccentric Scottish biologist, town planner, educator and peace activist

* Courtesy, *The Telegraph*, Calcutta.

(1854–1932). Geddes had a long and intimate association with India, particularly Calcutta, and was a close associate of Rabin-dranath Tagore and Jagadish Chandra Bose. Between 1914 and 1924, he travelled extensively in the Indian sub-continent as a town planning consultant and made surveys and set forth proposals and plans for some 50 towns. Most notable among these is his two-volume report on the replanning of Indore. He also prepared a report on area improvement in Barra Bazar, Calcutta in 1919. For Mumford, Geddes' work provided the basic direction and the skeleton which he then added flesh to. In 1938, as consultant to the City and County Park Board in Honolulu, Hawaii, the follower of the 'garden city' Master prepared a booklet *Whither Honolulu?* based on his study of the parks and playgrounds of that city. Again, recalling Geddes' efforts at organizing 'cities exhibitions', in 1939 Mumford worked on a documentary film *The City* which was shown at the city planning exhibit at the New York World's Fair. He refers to the city in history as 'the form and symbol of an integrated social relationship: it is the seat of the temple, the market, the hall of justice, the academy of learning. Here is where the issues of civilization are focussed: here, too, ritual passes on occasion into the active drama of a fully differentiated and self-conscious society. Today, the physical dimensions and the scope of the city have changed and most of the city's internal functions and structures must be recast to promote effectively the larger purpose of unification of man's inner and outer life, leading to the unification of mankind itself.'

Perhaps because of the Geddes connection, Mumford was deeply interested in India. He studied Indian history and religion and closely followed Geddes' town planning work. He was also personally acquainted with Radhakamal Mukherjee, a professor of sociology and disciple of Geddes, whose work dwelt on human interactions with nature—which he called 'social ecology'. Mukherjee has written extensively on the ecological basis of civilization in Gangetic Bengal, culminating in the emergence of Calcutta as a metropolis—but one



Lewis Mumford: Sociologist, philosopher, cultural historian

that makes a dysfunctional break from its ecological and social roots. Environmental historian Ramachandra Guha has referred to Lewis Mumford as 'the patron saint of environmentalism'. And interestingly, in the Indian context, among the ecological pioneers referred to by him are Patrick Geddes and Radhakamal Mukherjee (besides anthropologist Verrier Elwin and the Gandhian constructive worker J.C. Kuma-rappa). Mumford can thus be justifiably regarded as closely connected with the crystallization of environmental consciousness in our country.

Today, as an act of civic renewal, when we are beginning to think about the future of Calcutta and its hinterland, a future in which the city and its bio-region would be wedded in symbiosis, where the management of land, water, silt, wastes and of the complex deltaic riverine system would be among the prime functions of the envisioned 'biotechnic' city, it is to the work of Geddes, Mumford and Mukherjee that we turn, in a process of renewal of civic wisdom that can serve as the basis for city and regional renewal. □

Reviews & Notices

MĀNDŪKYA-UPANIṢAD (with Gaudapāda's Kārikā): tr. and with notes based on Śaṅkara's Commentary by Swami Lokeswarananda; publ. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta 700 029; 1995; pp. 281; paperback Rs. 45/-.

The book under review is based on Swami Lokeswarananda's weekly discourses. Other Upaniṣads edited by the author are *Īśa*, *Kena*, *Kāṭha*, *Muṇḍaka*, and *Svetāśvatara*.

Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad is very important from the standpoint of the Advaita Vedānta. Here we get Advaita in its final form. If Brahman as Consciousness is the only Reality, what is other than Consciousness is other than Reality. The world being unconscious is not real. Gaudapāda in his *Kārikā* has made out this point by denying the causal relation altogether. In Advaita there are three stages. First, the acceptance of both the Cause and the Effect (Śaṅkara's Commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtra*, 2.1.13). Second, the denial of the Effect independent of the Cause (Śaṅkara's Commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtra*, 2.1.14). Third, the denial of both the Cause and the Effect (*Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad-Kārikā*, IV.22).

Gaudapāda is the grand preceptor of Śaṅkara who wrote a commentary on Gaudapāda's *Kārikā*. Gaudapāda is correctly understood when it is read in the light of Śaṅkara's Commentary. We have many editions of the *Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad* in English with *Kārikā* and Śaṅkara's Comments on it. The edition under review is an addition to the list with some difference. Lokeswarananda in this edition has made the difficult texts simple and lucid, without sacrificing their excellence. To make difficult things lucid is a very difficult task. Swami Lokeswarananda has the rare ability in this regard.

The book under review includes six

chapters—Invocation, Introduction, Āgama Prakaraṇa, Vaitathya Prakaraṇa, Advaita Prakaraṇa and Alātaśānti Prakaraṇa. The Invocation presents a very appropriate prayer for the study of the text. Our bodies and minds should be steady, and no problems created. We should hear and see good things. That is our prayer. In the Introduction the text has been given as found in the *Atharva-Veda*, having only twelve verses, and as one of the shortest Upaniṣads. The *Kārikā*, according to some scholars, sounds very much like Buddhist Idealism, but Gaudapāda does not admit this. Most Upaniṣads have one or more stories round which the philosophy they are presenting is woven. This is not the case with the *Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad*. It gives its message not through a story but through a symbol, which is *Aum*, commonly pronounced as *Om*. No amount of discussion can give us the idea about Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. So this symbol has been used. 'Āgama Prakaraṇa' is a chapter based on the scriptural wisdom. 'Vaitathya Prakaraṇa' deals with misapprehension and its removal. 'Advaita Prakaraṇa' is on the Non-dual Truth, and 'Alātaśānti Prakaraṇa' discusses disillusionment.

In the Invocation and in the Prakaraṇas, the text is presented first in *devanāgarī* and then in roman script. Translation in English follows. Last of all, explanation and notes are added. Key to transliteration and pronunciation has been supplied in the beginning. This is a help to the study of the book.

Readers who like to have *Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad* with *Kārikā* and Śaṅkara's Comments on it in lucid and intelligible English will find the book under review a helpful companion. The book deserves a wide circulation.

Prof. Nirod Baran Chakraborty
Calcutta

(Please turn over)

VAIṢṆAVISM: Contemporary scholars discuss the Gaudīya tradition: Ed. Steven J. Rosen; publ. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 41 U. A. Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007; 1994; pp. 354 + ix; Rs. 160/-.

Vaiṣṇavism is a rich and significant religious movement well known for its beauty and profundity. Its origin can be traced in the Vedas, Purāṇas, Epics and other authoritative texts. It is enriched by the *sādhana* and reflections of a galaxy of outstanding mystics and saints. Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism is a form of Vaiṣṇavism that flourished in Bengal in the sixteenth century with Sri Chaitanya Mahāprabhu as its chief exponent. Some scholars and academics call it Chaitanyaite Vaiṣṇavism since Sri Chaitanya infused vitality into this religious movement by his saintly personality and devotionism. He made it more meaningful and relevant as a system of religious belief and practice.

The book under review is an outstanding collection of treatises on Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism with contributions from some twenty-five contemporary scholars from both within and outside India, elucidating different aspects relevant to the understanding of this school. The scholars have dedicated much time and energy to researching the tradition of the Gaudīya school, and have approached the various issues involved with their own characteristic perspective. We have here a unique compendium of extraordinary merit and scholarship.

The book developed out of a series of informal interviews with some of the brilliant scholars on Hinduism hailing mostly from the West. They have outpoured the fruits of their research to make the conversations enlivening, educative, and academically useful. Steven J. Rosen has done a marvellous job by choosing an easy conversational style, himself sharing the burden of posing questions that are vital for comprehending Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism.

There are three sections in the volume. The first discusses the literature and histori-

cal development of the Gaudīya tradition. The second is concerned with the pilgrimage sites connected with Sri Chaitanya and his associates, and gives the details of Sri Chaitanya's association with the sacred places he visited. And the third part deals with the theology and practices of the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism. Some of the interesting questions discussed in the book are: Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism in the modern world, Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity, Personalism vs Impersonalism, *Achintya Bhedabheda*, Rasa-theology, Rādhā, Beloved of Vraja, etc., showing the extent and depth of the present study.

Dr. Edward C. Dimock, Jr., a profound scholar and a doyen of Bengal Vaiṣṇava studies in the West, contributes an illuminating Foreword to the work and contends that Steven Rosen's treatises would further inform '...the already informed and ...stimulating the uninformed to inform themselves of a highly rewarding system of thought and instructive slice of religious history.' The reviewer agrees with this observation and recommends the work as *a must* to every serious student of Vaiṣṇavism in general and Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism in particular. Every reader, be he a scholar or a layman, will be impressed by this penetrating and stimulating publication.

The paper, printing and get-up of the book are all excellent, and the price is moderate. M/s Motilal Banarsidass Publishers should be congratulated for presenting to us such an interesting and informative work.

Prof. Ranjit Kumar Acharjee
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SRI STUTI OF SRI VEDANTA DESIKA (Translations in English, Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu): Publ. Sri Vedanta Desika Research Centre, 40 Sannidhi Street, Villivakkam, Madras 600 049; 1994; price not mentioned.

In the Sri Vaishna, or Visishtadvaita, School of Philosophy, 'Sri' or Lakshmi, the divine consort of Sri Narayana, is considered to be co-eternal with Him. She may give liberation to devotees Herself or may

intercede on their behalf with the Lord—these views depend on whether the devotee belongs to the northern or the southern sect of Sri Vaishnavism.

Sri Vedanta Desika, a great philosopher-saint belonging to the northern, or Vada-galai, sect is accorded a place only next to the illustrious Acharya Ramanuja. Belonging to the 13th and 14th centuries AD, he was a prolific writer, and has to his credit a number of philosophical treatises as well as devotional works written in Sanskrit and Tamil.

The Vedanta Desika Research Centre of Madras has undertaken the commendable and worthy task of getting some of the literary works of Sri Desika translated into various Indian languages and English. This will not only help in getting a wider section of people acquainted with his works, but also help those who recite the *stotras* devotionally understand them. The Centre has appropriately started with *Śrī Stuti*, the hymn to Lakshmi, and thus seek the Mother's blessings for the success of their venture.

The *Śrī Stuti* is a hymn of twenty-five verses written in simple Sanskrit but with deep import. It eulogizes Lakshmi's greatness, Her compassion and Her divine beauty, which enhances the splendour of Sri Vishnu whose bosom She adorns. It is only through Her grace (*dayā*) that mortals can overcome their passions and petty desires.

At present the *Śrī Stuti* has been translated into English, Hindi, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu. The translations provide the meaning of each verse and also explanatory notes (*tātparya*). This has been very well done in Telugu and Hindi. The English translation is rendered in verse form. This does not help in understanding the word-for-word meaning and, per se, may not be easily understood. The sentences in the Kannada translation are, at many places, extremely lengthy—sometimes the whole translation runs into a single para! A good translation should be in simple and short sentences. We hope these criticisms can be taken into consideration for future editions and translations.

Dr. Kamala S. Jaya Rao,
Hyderabad

THE FOUNDATIONS OF LIVING FAITHS:
An Introduction to Comparative Religion: by Haridas Bhattacharya; publ. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 41 U. A. Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007; 1994; pp. 557 plus xvii; Rs. 425/-.

This book is a reprint of Professor Haridas Bhattacharya's Stephanos Nirmalendu Lectures delivered at the University of Calcutta in 1934 and published four years later by the same University. Professor Bhattacharya believes that all the living religions have some element of goodness in them and are 'capable of development in diverse degrees'. Through the ages man has sought solace in some form of religion 'amidst the fluxes of worldly life'. In fact, man's adventure in faith is 'the oldest and the most formidable'. During the course of time many faiths like that of the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Teutonic degenerated and fell into oblivion because of gross superstitions, myths and obsolescent rituals. 'Religion is a matter of light and shade combined, and the dim religious lights always disappear in the glare of intellectual illumination.'

Chapter One delineates the nature and characteristics of living faiths, taking in its gamut such aspects as the origin of religion, and its relation with reason, revelation and mysticism, the role of magic, sorcery, witchcraft, and similar arts of the primitive shaman in the making of religion, the criterion of living faith, religious movements of medieval and modern India, revivalist and reformatory trends in different religions, and so on.

Chapter Two dilates on the prophets of different religions, taking note of their extraordinary powers, apocalyptic visions, arduous tasks, sense of mission, and secrets of their success. Prophets are regarded as divine incarnations much above sages, priests, preachers or reformers. They can transcend the temporal plane and peep into the past or delve into the future. Buddha, for example, remembered all the events of his previous births. The Jewish prophets foretold the fall

of Jerusalem and the fate of many nations and individuals. Hajrat Mohammed too had visions of the future.

Besides, the task of prophets is 'to wean men's minds away from the spectacular and the occasional to the abiding laws of truth and morality' (Chapter Three). Their message is simple but supreme, and it pours forth spontaneously. An element of Divine Grace is conspicuous in each divine revelation. The prophets don't ratiocinate; the truth dawns on them and they act as a supreme medium to disseminate it. Bhattacharya brings out historical data pertaining to various religions to explain how the Revelations metamorphose societies and shape the destinies of communities or nations.

Subsequent chapters analyse the nature, concept and forms of God in Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism. Polytheism, atheism, agnosticism, animism and fetishism also come in for discussion. Sacred objects, abstract gods, confederacy of gods, sin and grace, Manichaeism, Vedicism and Zoroastrianism, Mazdaism, Islamic mysticism and Hindu pantheism, Islamic claim to universality and the nature of Islamic toleration, the Holy Spirit in Christianity, the Christology of the Synoptic Gospels, the dangers of anthropomorphism, the purified forms of Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Vedanta, the evolution of the Shakti cult, sectarian religious movements—these and other subjects have been lucidly explained and interpreted.

Bhattacharya holds that a religion should have enough flexibility to cope with the challenges of the changing milieu; or else it will degenerate into 'a tribal custom or a social habit'. When a religion endeavours to retain and justify 'every bit of religious thinking—good, bad or indifferent—performed by the original seer and his successors in the faith', it is sure to become 'a museum of mummified relics' of the past.

Rarely does one come across a work so methodical, erudite, interesting and inspiring as this one.

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A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE UNIVERSAL RELIGION OF RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHAMSA: By Dr. Mamata Kundu; publ. Dev Sahitya Kutir Pvt. Ltd.; 21 Jhamapukur Lane, Calcutta 700 009; 1993; pp. 194; Rs. 50/-.

The book under review is a dissertation by the author, written with the objective of finding out the hidden treasure lying in the religious philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna, and its relevance to the modern age.

The author discusses chapterwise: religion in the modern mind, some antireligious views of the modern age, and analysis of the essential elements in religion, historical development of religion—from primitive to universal religion, a new humanistic approach to universal religion, Indian concept of universal religion, background of universal religion of Sri Ramakrishna, religious philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna in the light of classical Vedanta, a new approach in Ramakrishna's philosophy and its deflection from classical Vedanta, Ramakrishna's experiences in different religious practices, and the main features of the universal religion of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

It is certainly a praiseworthy endeavour—to dwell upon such a broad range of subjects, which requires deep study and reflection. The writer has been quite successful in pointing out that the modern world reeling under ignorance and dissension will find in Sri Ramakrishna's universal religion the proper path to tread in order to rise above the problems of our time. However, the reviewer feels that the theme of contemporary relevance could have been made more interesting, attractive and readable if it had been written with greater succinctness while discussing the theme-wise subtleties. Absence of such clarity and precision makes the reading monotonous and even boring. One would expect such clarity also in the conclusion of the dissertation which is lacking here. Despite this, the author deserves to be congratulated.

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